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World Histories

The WWII obsession

Why the world can't move on from 1945

PLUS

BRITAIN'S WAR DELUSION

BBC
RADIO

4

Neil MacGregor on how the conflict has been misremembered

THE SUMMIT THAT RESHAPED EUROPE

Behind the scenes at 1945's
Yalta Conference



Concentration camps: From Dachau to Texas?

Why the United States forgot its Hispanic past

The truth behind 1984 and *The Handmaid's Tale*
How real history inspired fictional dystopias

The long roots of today's Kashmir crisis



Sylvia strikes back

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back to research and treatment**

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The Second World War began 80 years ago this September. In many ways, its legacy is still with us.

From the conflict's economic and social repercussions to its lasting geopolitical legacy, the conflagration of 1939–45 reshaped the global order to an extent unparalleled before or since. Yet equally important are the ways in which the war – its apparent narratives and iconography – have been used to define and shift concepts of national identity and belonging around the world.

This issue, our panel of experts investigates the factors behind our **Second World War obsession**, as well as the consequences of our failure to move on. That starts on page 40.

Elsewhere, we examine other echoes of that past. In our Long Read feature, Dan Stone explores the recent debate about **whether US 'border centres' in Texas can accurately be referred to as 'concentration camps'**. Are there parallels in this history, and does our uncertainty point to a wider confusion about that past? You can read that from page 23.

The use and wilful misuse of language is, of course, a key theme in George Orwell's 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, from political sloganeering to outright censorship. On page 66, Dorian Lynskey chronicles **the real events and characters that inspired the dystopian classic**.

If all that sounds rather bleak, there's lightness, too. From **pioneer women of the American West** (page 56) to a **pioneering Islamic explorer of the medieval world** (page 86), this issue is, as ever, a rich tapestry. As always, we'd love to hear what you think; please do share your thoughts via the address below.



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Families pose with their wagons near the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, late 19th century. On page 56, Karen R Jones tells the stories of women grasping new social opportunities in the American West

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BY DORIAN LYNSEY

In writing his classic novel, Orwell drew on the very real horrors of the 20th century
Plus From *We* to *The Handmaid's Tale*, how history inspired five other fictional dystopias

★ **On the cover**



COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DAVIDE BONAZZI

ALAMY

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Expert voices from the world of history



Carrie Gibson

The story of Hispanic settlement in North America provides key insights into contemporary issues of migration. As the historian and author explains on **page 14**, there is a “long, intertwined history between Spain, the United States and its southern neighbour republics, much of which has faded from public memory”.



Karen R Jones

“The history of ‘how the West was won’ (or lost) was much more variegated than the vision presented in traditional historical readings and countless Hollywood westerns,” the University of Kent historian explains on **page 56**, exploring a less well-known narrative of 19th-century pioneer women on the US frontier.



Dorian Lynskey

On **page 66** the *Guardian* writer reveals the events that influenced George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). “[He] learned about many of the features of Stalinism that would feed into his great novel: the cult of personality; the rewriting of history; the assault on freedom of speech and thought,” says Lynskey.



Neil MacGregor

The historian and broadcaster discusses *As Others See Us*, his new BBC Radio 4 series exploring how other nations view Britain's history, on **page 76**. “Without exception, people in other countries know a great deal more about Britain and its history than British people do about them and theirs,” he says.



Dan Stone

The professor of modern history at Royal Holloway University of London looks at concentration camps on **page 23**. “Historians are obliged to stress that the various examples are not all the same: they occurred at different times, in different places, and were administered by different regimes with differing ideologies,” he writes.



Chitrlekha Zutshi

India's move to revoke the special status of Jammu & Kashmir has sparked global debate. On **page 10**, Chitrlekha Zutshi, professor of history at The College of William and Mary in Virginia, explores the decision. “The secular, federal consensus with which India came into existence seems to be of the past,” she suggests.

The Briefing

The history behind today's news

View-points

Expert opinions on historical issues that touch today's world

INTERNATIONAL GEOPOLITICS

Geography of power

The political and military rise of China to 'great power' status was prophesied by geopolitical thinkers over a century ago – and now China is studying those ideas to help plan its next moves

BY PHIL TINLINE

By the end of this year, in an unambiguous declaration of its status as a great power, China will formally put its first domestically made aircraft carrier into active service. But Beijing is also keen to acquire another offshore asset: Taiwan.

In August 1950, General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan, controversially declared Taiwan an “unsinkable aircraft carrier”, a few months after it had broken from the newly communist mainland and was on its way to becoming part of America’s efforts to contain ‘Red China’. A rising China wants the island back.

The Taiwanese have been watching this summer’s protests in Hong Kong nervously, and their opposition to the prospect of Beijing rule has hardened:

the Pentagon recently approved a potential sale to Taiwan of US weaponry worth \$2 billion, a move that outraged the People’s Republic.

All of this was shaped by a mode of analysis that developed during the last period of great power rivalry in the late 19th century: geopolitics. As we enter a new era dominated by rival great powers, the use of geography to forge foreign policy and military strategy is back in vogue. China insists that Taiwan is a breakaway province, but there is another reason it wants to reclaim the island. As an ‘aircraft carrier’, Taiwan is not only unsinkable – it’s also perfectly positioned to command access to the South China Sea, and sea lanes to South Korea, Japan and the Pacific. As host to the US Taiwan Defense Command, it used to make life very difficult for the Chinese navy – but if the People’s

Three geopolitical writers of the last age of great powers looked at the map, discerned something of where we are now – and grew anxious



Liberation Army had command of Taiwan, it would throw open China's strategic options.

Geopolitics has often been criticised as deterministic, casting a cold, Olympian eye across the planet and sketching grand concepts on empty maps, ignoring human complexity. In a pre-echo of MacArthur, in 1943 one geopolitical thinker called Britain a “moated aerodrome” – reminiscent of the re-designation of this island as Air-strip One in George Orwell's 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. But geopolitics has also shown that it can influence and prophesy, not least with regard to the rise of China itself. Three leading Anglophone geopolitical writers of the

last age of great powers all looked at the map, discerned something of where we are now – decades in advance – and grew anxious.

As the 19th century culminated in naval rivalry between rising imperial states, US sea captain Alfred Thayer Mahan became a scholarly prophet of the influence of sea power. His work shaped the growth not only of the US navy but also of Germany's and Japan's. In 1890, as American ships projected power west into the Pacific, Mahan worried that eventually they would meet Chinese power coming the other way. This led him to support the establishment of a US base in Hawaii. In *The Problem of Asia* (1900), he warned of a “great inevitable future”, if China remained a single state, “when, aroused to the consciousness of power, and organised by the appropriation of European methods”, the Chinese “shall

be able to assert an influence proportionate to their mass, and to demand their shares in the general advantage”.

Four years later, Britain's pioneering geopolitical thinker, Sir Halford Mackinder – he of the “moated aerodrome” – challenged Mahan's veneration of sea power. In a lecture titled ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’ (1904), Mackinder argued that, with the advent of transcontinental railways, the resources of the Eurasian ‘heartland’ – roughly, Russia plus Central Asia – could be marshalled to build a huge fleet. This could sail out from a home state that could not be attacked by sea.

But Mackinder also perceived a threat dormant in China's geography, suggesting that it might expand west into the heartland (albeit under Japanese direction), adding “an oceanic frontage to the resources of the great continent”. Today, China is not proposing to conquer Russia. However, through both its Belt and Road Initiative – an ambitious infrastructure project aiming to connect Asia with Africa and Europe by developing new land and sea routes – and its expanding naval presence, China is making increasingly assertive use of its combination of land power and sea power.

These predictions cast a rising China as a distant prospect. But in 1942 Nicholas Spykman, a Dutch-American academic, argued in *America's Strategy*



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in *World Politics* that, after the Second World War was over, the chief challenge in the region would not come from Japan, whose imperial army was then tyrannising much of east Asia. Spykman was more concerned about one of the countries then suffering under Japanese occupation. "A modern, vitalised, and militarised China of 450 million people," he wrote, "is going to be a threat not only to Japan, but also to the position of the Western Powers in the Asiatic Mediterranean." In a later work, Spykman went on to argue that island bases should be sufficient to stop China from dominating the far east – bases such as those in Japan, Guam, the Philippines and, until America formally withdrew in 1979, that "unsinkable aircraft carrier", Taiwan.

You might think that these old geopolitical texts would be dismissed in China as clapped-out imperialism. But now that it is becoming a great power itself, China's policy experts have been studying them closely – particularly Mahan, the prophet of sea power who warned of China's rise 129 years ago. The question now is how they put their studies into action. 🌐



Phil Tinline is a BBC documentary-maker. His BBC Radio 4 documentary *Land Power v Sea Power* is available on BBC Sounds



FRENCH-GERMAN RELATIONS

Continental rift

As Brexit approaches, European gazes are fixed on the UK – but in truth the split that really defines the EU is a cultural and economic divide between France and Germany

BY ANNE MCELVOY

Think of the modern relationship between France and Germany, and pictures of amity spring to mind.

One memorable image is that of France's foreign minister, Robert Schuman, shaking the hand of West Germany's first post-war leader, Konrad Adenauer, following the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1951, agreeing co-operation on coal and steel production to forfend any further conflict between the nations.

Events commemorating the world wars have subsequently provided the backdrop for efforts to forge a closer relationship. On 25 September 1984,

for example, West German chancellor Helmut Kohl and French president François Mitterrand held hands in the Douaumont cemetery at Verdun to mark the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. And last November, Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron made a show of solidarity while visiting Compiègne to mark a century since the armistice ending that conflict was signed.

Today's major continental powers are not, thankfully, anywhere near the brink of war. But they are more distinct in their approaches to the institutional Europe than these shows of unity suggest. This distinctiveness in their outlooks on political economy has been

SARAH-JANEFIELD



dubbed the Rhine Divide. (To stave off complaints by pedants, this refers to the stretch of the Rhine that marks the national border between Alsace and Baden-Württemberg.) More broadly, it reflects the persistence of outlooks pre-dating the First World War.

The Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71 is not one the EU much likes to commemorate, but it marked the moment when Bismarck's emerging unified Germany defeated the 'Grande Nation' and overthrew the Second Empire. It marked the rise of Germany, not only as a ruthless military power but also as a technologically more adroit one.

As Andreas Roedder, who teaches history at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, observes: "For Germans the historical trauma is inflation – and for the French, the historical trauma is the Germans." But what does that mean for relations between the two today?

Princeton economist Markus Brunnermeier says that understanding the outcome of the Second World War is central to understanding the current

Rhine Divide (a term he popularised, incidentally). Since that conflict, Germany has been run as a decentralised state, held together by budgetary and deficit rules, and imposing austerity on itself and others in lean times. By contrast, France is a strongly centralised power that tends to try to spend its way out of trouble. French debt stands at an eye-watering 99% of GDP as President Macron loosens fiscal girdles in an attempt to see off the *gilet jaunes* ('yellow vests') protesters with spending pledges.

Why is France more prone to spend-thrift ways than Germany? "People looked back at the 1930s, when there were austerity measures in France, and saw cutbacks in military expenditure," Brunnermeier notes. "That was seen as a big mistake when the Germans attacked in 1940. So the France we see today – with more planning, more intervention in the economy – is a corrective to a period that presaged disaster for France."

It is often said that Germans, recalling the chaos of the Weimar years,

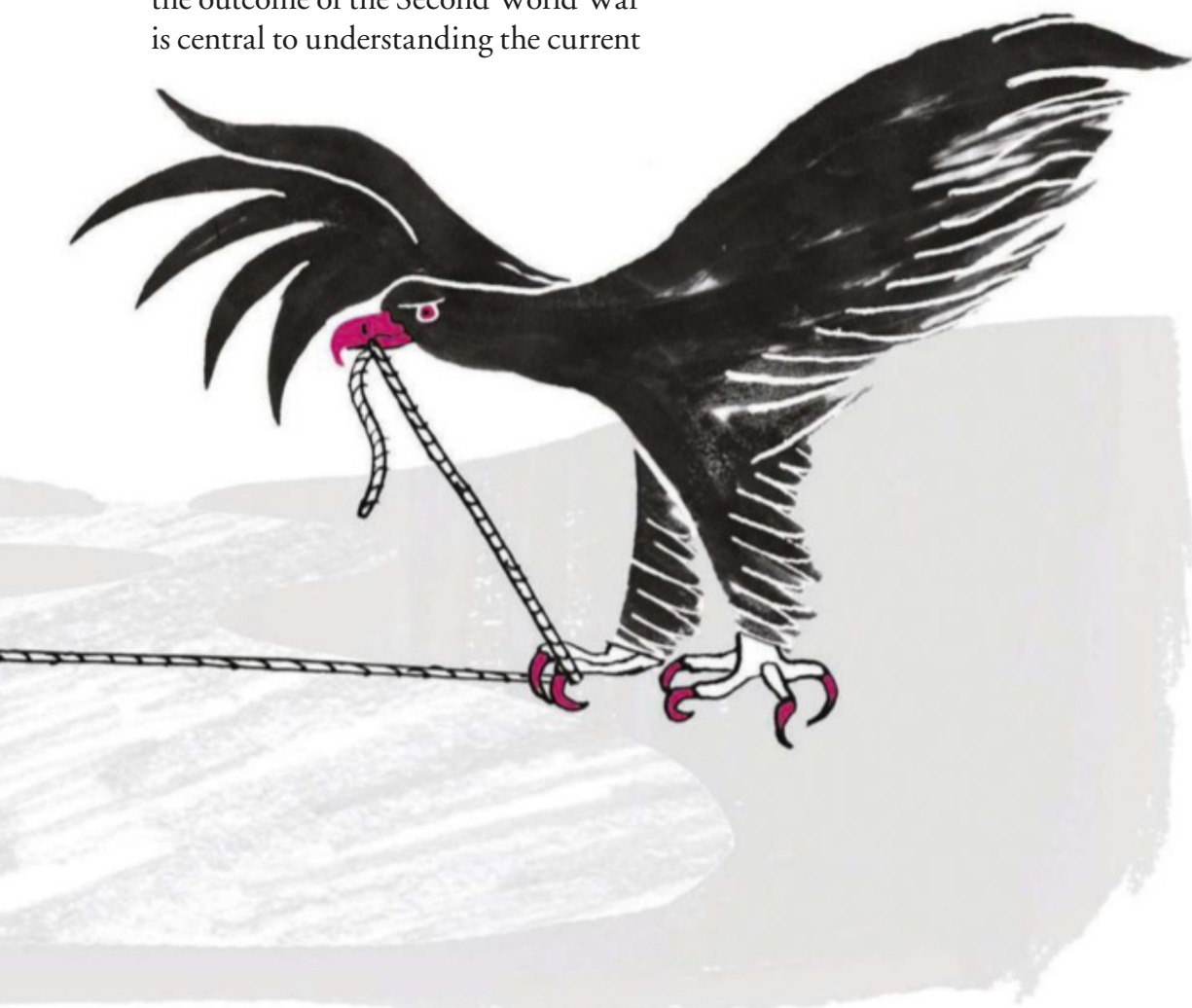
The so-called Rhine Divide permeates the shape and priorities of the EU more powerfully than the UK

fear hyperinflation. This makes them inclined towards deflationary policies. The result has seen doses of austerity meted out to the likes of Ireland and Greece by the German-run European Central Bank, aiming to stem the risk of inflation creeping back into the system.

But there are cultural as well as economic differences in the two nations' political attitudes. The *gloire* of French presidents is different from the pragmatic, party-balancing role of German chancellors. Even the grandiose 'Kohllooseum' – the federal chancellery built in Berlin after unification – feels like a big, echoing office. The Élysée in Paris, on the other hand, is a true palace, with its Gobelin tapestries and priceless artworks (no spending constraint there).

One big reason that relations beneath the surface have not been smooth between Merkel and Macron is that he argued for structural reforms of the French economy and to reform the Eurozone. That required money from the EU pot – which, in effect, means the German one. Merkel – true to the stereotype of thrifty German leaders – has refused any serious rise in the Eurozone budget. That strain will manifest itself the next time there is a crisis in the Eurozone, because there is no agreed way of dealing with an internal or external shock. Another bout of austerity would not get a warm welcome across a Europe experiencing populist insurgencies.

When it comes to Brexit, the European 27 have toughed it out



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together; indeed, the prospect of a British goodbye has had a consolidating effect on the big countries – certainly, no one else is in a hurry to leave. Yet the Rhine Divide is still felt as the EU faces up to the all-round impact of a 'No Deal' Brexit. France seems more inclined to cut the UK loose and deal with the damage to the EU. Merkel is more cautious, unwilling to be seen to welcome the sudden fracturing of a significant trading relationship. Tonally, the mood differs, even as the two insist on presenting a unified front in Brussels.

The impact of the final outcome may stretch beyond internal British politics, even if the leader in Downing Street finds that, as one mistress naughtily said of Louis XIV, he is “a powerful king with a very small sceptre” when it comes to negotiating terms with the continent. Yet the Rhine Divide permeates the shape and priorities of the EU more powerfully than the UK. Two cultures that seek affinity channel their historical traumas in distinctive ways. History always flows along the Rhine. 🌐



Anne McElvoy is senior editor at *The Economist* and presents *France and Germany: Divided They Stand* for BBC Radio 4, available on BBC Sounds



KASHMIR TENSIONS

Status check

India's presidential order to repeal the special status of Jammu & Kashmir reflects a long-term trend away from secularism and federalism

BY **CHITRALEKHA ZUTSHI**

On 5 August, the newly re-elected Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India announced that a presidential order had repealed Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which had given special status to the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The government also pushed through, with overwhelming majorities in both houses of parliament, a bill that stripped J&K of its status as a state, partitioning it into two union territories – Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh – to be ruled directly by the central government.

Article 370 had been enshrined into the Indian constitution in 1949 as a means of defining J&K's relationship with the Indian Union, and reflected the federal, plural and secular character of the Indian polity. India had claimed J&K precisely because the latter was a Muslim-majority state, and was willing to make concessions to allow Kashmiri Muslims to feel secure in a Hindu-majority India.

Indeed, part of the reason that the J&K leadership was leaning towards acceding to India in 1947 was because India had decided to adopt a secular constitution based on political, economic and social rights for all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation or social status. This, alongside India's assurances that it would preserve J&K's autonomy within the Indian Union, made it a safer bet than Pakistan.

As with all princely states – as it was at the time of Indian independence in

1947 – J&K deferred to India on only three matters: defence, external affairs and communications. In part because it was disputed territory, and in part because its leadership negotiated for autonomy during constitutional talks, Article 370 allowed J&K special privileges. One such was the establishment of its own constituent assembly, which had the power to frame the state's constitution as well as make decisions about whether it wanted to accede to India on any further subjects.

Article 370, however, became a hollow shell soon after it was implemented. An earlier incarnation of the BJP, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, joined hands with a movement in Jammu that emerged in the early 1950s in an attempt to abolish the state's special status and integrate it completely into India. This movement eventually led in 1953 to the downfall of the first government of J&K – the one that had negotiated its special status.

The insurgency in Kashmir that began more than 30 years ago is likely to be strengthened by this latest turn of events

Subsequent state governments in the 1950s and 1960s were willing to collaborate with the central government to erode Article 370. It nonetheless remained a powerful symbol of the pact between India and one of its constituent units – one, though, against which the BJP has consistently campaigned.

The recent presidential order that extends all provisions of the Indian Constitution to J&K has also rendered unconstitutional Article 35A of the Indian constitution. This article was introduced into the constitution through a 1954 presidential order that gave the J&K state legislature the right to define permanent residents of the state. In effect, this article prevented outsiders from settling in and buying property in J&K.

The BJP's explanation for its move is that the special status has prevented the state's economic development and thus encouraged disgruntlement among the local population. In this logic, the BJP is no different from earlier central governments, which threw economic aid at J&K in the hopes that its population would be pacified. But this has not solved the underlying political grievances of the Kashmiri Muslim population, which has felt increasingly disenfranchised and alienated from India because

of the central government's high-handedness. The insurgency against the Indian state that began more than 30 years ago continues to rage and is likely to be emboldened by this latest turn of events, which confirms what Kashmiris have known for decades – that, for India, Kashmir is a territory devoid of people.

It's difficult now to understand how the BJP expects to resolve India's Kashmir problem – if that is even

possible under such conditions. Perhaps its gambit is what Kashmiri Muslims have been fearing for a long time: that the repeal of Article 35A could ultimately alter Kashmir's demographic composition from a Muslim-majority to a Hindu-majority region. It is the major reason that Pakistan has registered a protest against this move, because its claim on the region will not be valid if it no longer has a Muslim majority.

The secular, federal consensus with which India came into existence seems to be a thing of the past. With this latest move, it has been decisively replaced by the muscular, militaristic idea of India as a centralised Hindu nation. Regardless of the outcome of the challenges to these particular measures towards J&K in the courts, that idea appears to be here to stay. 🌐



Chitralekha Zutshi

is James Pinckney Harrison Professor of History at The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia

History Headlines

2 QUEBEC CANADA

Journey's end

The bones of 21 migrants killed in a shipwreck while fleeing the Irish Famine have been buried in Canada. The passengers sailed from Sligo in spring 1847 aboard the *Carricks of Whitehaven*, which sank in a storm off the Gaspé Peninsula, Quebec; of some 180 passengers, most perished. After recent analysis of bones found on Cap-des-Rosiers beach in 2011 and 2016 confirmed their origins, they were buried near the Irish Memorial on the beach.



The remains of Irish migrants shipwrecked off the Canadian coast in 1847 are buried in Quebec

3 LAGUNA EK'NAAB GUATEMALA

The war before

Charcoal samples from a lake bed could help rewrite the story of Classic Mayan civilisation. Historians long theorised that cities emptied following resource wars sparked by droughts in the eighth and ninth centuries. Analysis of sediment samples from Laguna Ek'Naab, northern Guatemala, revealed charcoal deposits consistent with a major fire around AD 690–700 – corroborating a Mayan inscription describing the burning of a city in 697. This may indicate that 'total' warfare was widespread long before the drought period, and that the Maya's story "really needs reconsideration", says paleoclimatologist David Wahl.



Mayan warfare may have been more destructive and less ritualised earlier than previously thought

1 ORKNEY SCOTLAND

Skol's out

Archaeologists have uncovered what they believe to be a Viking drinking hall on Orkney. Pottery, a spindle whorl and a bone comb fragment were found among the stone ruins on Skaill Farmstead in Westness, Rousay, which are over 13 metres long. The site, thought to date back to the 10th century, may have been used in the 12th century by the influential chieftain Earl Sigurd of Westness. Experts hope that the discovery will shed light on diet and agriculture in the Norse period.



Viking-era artefacts excavated at Skaill Farmstead, Orkney, include this carved bone comb



The plaster cast of the remains of a horse excavated near Pompeii in 2018

4 NAPLES ITALY

Hot topic

A dispute has erupted between volcanologists and archaeologists at the ancient site of Pompeii, where major excavations are underway. In an open letter to the scientific journal *Nature*, published in July, a team of volcanology experts expressed alarm "that volcanic deposits are being sacrificed" during the dig. Volcanologist Professor Roberto Scandone argued that experts working on the Great Pompeii Project "seem not to realise that the enthusiasm for archaeology is committing an act of vandalism to volcanology".

5 PROKHOROVKA RUSSIA

Warning shots

Russian officials have been angered by a new view of a key Second World War tank clash. The battle of Prokhorovka (12 July 1943) is celebrated as a pivotal Soviet victory over German forces. However, new analysis by British historian Ben Wheatley suggests Soviet forces were decimated. Russia's ambassador to Germany accused an article citing Wheatley's conclusions in German newspaper *Die Welt* of attempting to "rewrite immutable historical facts".



A Soviet self-propelled gun advances during the 1943 battle of Kursk, in which the clash at Prokhorovka was a key action

7 PAMIR PLATEAU CHINA

High times

The earliest known evidence of cannabis use has been found in tombs in far western China. Traces of the drug were found in wooden burners in the burial sites, which date back at least 2,500 years. Experts think that cannabis leaves were set alight in the braziers as part of funerary rituals, and that the smoke was inhaled for its psychoactive properties. 🌐

6 TELL TIMAI EGYPT

Old spice

An ancient Egyptian perfume has been recreated using residue found in two-millennia-old amphoras. The residue was discovered during an excavation of what is believed to be a fragrance factory in the ancient city of Thmuis (now Tell Timai), north of Cairo. Experts referred to ancient recipes and used ingredients including myrrh, cinnamon, olive oil and cardamom to recreate the scent, described as strong, spicy and musky.

GETTY IMAGES



Ancient Egyptian women wearing unguent cones containing scent on their heads. Would it have been "strong, spicy, musky"?



Artistic licence

A romanticised 1853 painting shows Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto discovering the Mississippi river in 1541. In fact, his mission was largely a failure, finding neither gold nor suitable sites for colonisation

State of flux

The Socorro Mission near El Paso, Texas, originally founded by Spanish Franciscans in 1682. The 'Lone Star State' was part of Mexico before it was annexed by the US in 1846



GETTY IMAGES



Spanish steps

Dancers in Santa Barbara, California celebrate the Old Spanish Days Fiesta. The US has the second-largest Spanish-speaking population in the world

AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN HISPANIC PAST

Tension between Anglo and Hispanic Americans in the US is a worrying phenomenon – but far from a new one. **Carrie Gibson** explains why, to understand these faultlines, we must revisit the neglected history of five centuries of Spanish settlement in North America



In 1855, a frustrated young newspaper editor, Francisco P Ramírez, lamented in an editorial for his Los Angeles publication *El Clamor Público* that “since the year of 1849, a certain animosity... has existed between the Mexicans and Americans, to such an extent that the Americans have wished with all their heart that all the Mexicans put together had no more than one head to cut off (to do away with them all at once)”.

Ramírez had witnessed many changes to his city, especially those brought by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the Mexican-American War. At the end of that conflict, which began in 1846, Mexico was forced to cede 51% of its land to the United States. That enormous territory was later carved into today's California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado. As a native of Los Angeles, in what had been Mexican Alta California (Upper California), Ramírez lived through these upheavals, watching the sleepy pueblo that was his hometown become a city populated by Anglo-Americans rushing in from the eastern United States.

Perhaps it was unsurprising that tensions arose. And such problems have continued in the US, linked with controversies over immigration from Latin America, and outbreaks of violence linked to anti-Hispanic sentiment. Understanding the context of these tensions is crucial – and that means tracing the long story of Spanish settlement in the western hemisphere.

Ramírez's life bridged two long chapters in the history of the United States and its southern neighbours. The first period was the three centuries of European colonisation that started with Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage and continued until the late 18th century with the onset of independence movements; the second was the 19th-century rise of the United States as a regional and global power. Taken together, these two eras span over 500 years of a long, intertwined history between Spain, the United States and its southern neighbour republics – much of which has faded from public memory.

Foundational myths

The founding mythology of the United States often focuses on the Pilgrims who arrived on the *Mayflower* in 1620, though sometimes it reaches back to earlier English settlements: the Virginia colony of 1607 or even the failed Roanoke colony of 1585. The Spanish-sponsored navigator Columbus is recognised for his 1492 crossing of the Atlantic, of course; indeed, there is still a public holiday named after him in the US. Yet well before the English arrived, the Spanish were trying – though mostly failing – to get a foothold on the North American mainland.

In 1513, Juan Ponce de León arrived on what he believed to be a place called Bimini, today the westernmost islands of the Bahamas (the myth that he was searching for the Fountain of Youth was created in a chronicle written over a decade after his death – he was, rather, seeking gold and indigenous people to enslave). Sailing from Puerto Rico, which he had earlier claimed for the Spanish crown, he landed on the Atlantic coast of the North American mainland, north of what's now Cape Canaveral, where he encountered the Ais people. Naming the land Florida, in honour of the Easter season (*Pascua Florida*) during which he landed, he continued exploring the coast, rounding the tip of the peninsula into the Gulf of Mexico and sailing north to the site of Fort Myers on the peninsula's west coast.

Here, Ponce de León spent a few weeks among the Calusa people. Whatever initial good feeling there might have been with these indigenous inhabitants soon evaporated, and he returned to the Caribbean. (When he made his report to the Spanish crown, though, he gave the impression that his mission had been a great success.) The Spanish explorer did not return to the area until 1521, and that expedition was even more disastrous: landing again among the Calusa, hostilities resumed and he was shot by an arrow. He developed gangrene and retreated, dying in Cuba in July that year.

Around the same time, fellow Conquistador Hernán Cortés had made his way to Tenochtitlán, eventually revealing to the world the wealth and splendour of Mexico. The exploits of Cortés fuelled the imagination and desires of many would-be Conquistadors, some of whom set their sights on Florida, and the failed expeditions began to mount up.

In 1526, Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón established a small settlement, San Miguel de Gualdape, on the coast of today's state of Georgia, among the Guale people. It lasted a few months before the surviving settlers – Ayllón not among them, having died that October – returned to the Caribbean. Two years later, Pánfilo de Narváez sailed to Florida on another ill-fated expedition during which everyone died. In 1538,

Hernando de Soto, who had enjoyed great success in Peru, decided to head to Florida but he, too, met with failure in 1542, and died somewhere near Louisiana. Despite this litany of disasters, another expedition was launched in 1559, under Tristán de Luna y Arellano, which founded a colony around Pensacola Bay; surviving a hurricane, it struggled on until finally being evacuated in 1561. Settling Florida seemed to be an impossible mission.

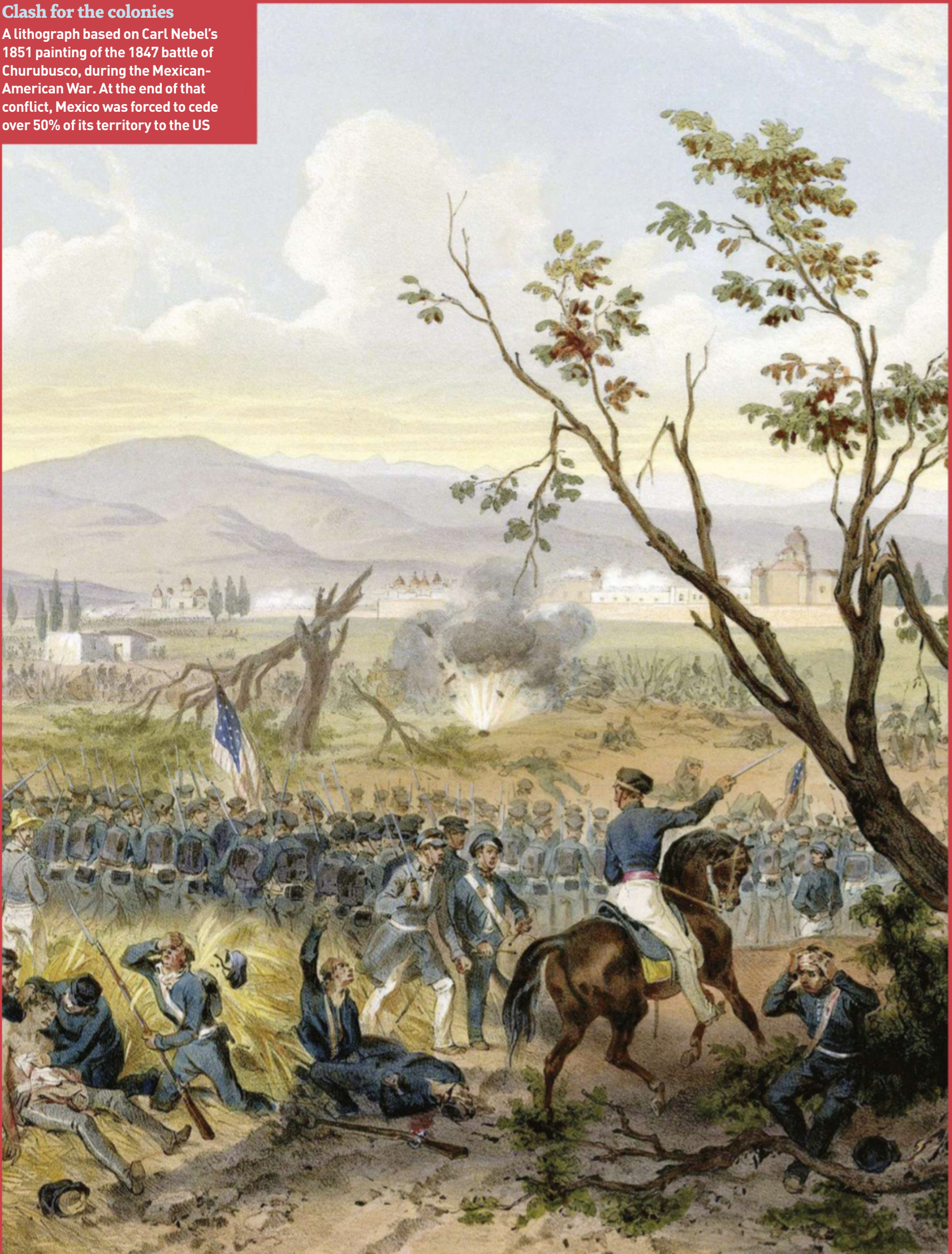
By this point, news of these (albeit largely failed) exploits was circulating Europe, whetting the appetites of would-be explorers and forcing Spain on the offensive. In May 1562, a group of Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France landed at the mouth of the



Defence of the realm
Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, who destroyed a French colony to ensure Spanish hegemony in Florida

Clash for the colonies

A lithograph based on Carl Nebel's 1851 painting of the 1847 battle of Churubusco, during the Mexican-American War. At the end of that conflict, Mexico was forced to cede over 50% of its territory to the US



In the early 18th century, Spain was the dominant power in the Americas, controlling territory from Tierra del Fuego to western Canada

St John's River (near Jacksonville, Florida) among the Timucua people. The French party explored north, stopping on an inlet they named Port Royal (around Parris Island, South Carolina), where they built a settlement they named Charlesfort. Some two dozen men were left there with instructions to build a fort while the others returned to France for reinforcements. Those men soon ran out of food, abandoning the settlement in April 1563.

In the meantime, news of the Huguenot pioneers' activity had reached Spanish ears, and a ship was dispatched to destroy the fort. By early 1564, a French convoy crossed the Atlantic; its passengers decided to stay near the St John's River, establishing Fort Caroline on a nearby bluff. Spain had continued to claim this entire territory, so this second fort was also slated for destruction. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés was charged with the task, and also given permission to establish a settlement in Florida. En route to the French fort, on 28 August 1565, Menéndez sighted land at a spot on the Atlantic coast around 100 miles north of where Ponce de León had first landed, which he would name St Augustine, after that saint's feast day. The following month, Menéndez led a violent and bloody massacre of the French. For the moment, European rivals had been repelled, leaving Florida for the Spanish to attempt to colonise.

Control of a continent

Though the Spanish held on to Florida, it never attracted many settlers. And while Conquistadors travelled overland through western Mexico during the same period, into what's now Texas and New Mexico, Native American resistance was fierce, and the number of people from Spain willing to live in those regions remained low. The Spanish crown did not have the resources to police all its claimed land, and eventually capitulated to the British and French in the continent's north.

By the early 18th century, a strip of land along the Atlantic seaboard was home to 13 British colonies, while France claimed land around the Great Lakes and a vast tract west of the Mississippi river it named Louisiana. Spain, however, was still the dominant power in the Americas, controlling territory from

Tierra del Fuego in distant South America to western Canada. However, much of the land remained unpopulated by Spaniards, though it was widely inhabited by various indigenous peoples. It was not until the 1770s that Spain was forced to put military garrisons along the California coast, in response to reports that Russian and British fur traders were creeping into the region.

Spain's substantial holdings had ballooned further with the addition of Louisiana, secretly ceded to Spain during the Seven Years' War (1756–63) by the French to keep it out of British hands. However, in the peace deal that ended the war, Spain lost Florida to Britain, trading it for Havana, which the British had successfully occupied in 1762. So when, just over a decade later, the inhabitants of British colonies geared up to revolt, they were surrounded by Spanish territory. The rebels thought that animosity between Spain and Britain could be used to their advantage, and in 1776 their minister in Paris, Benjamin Franklin, arranged a secret meeting with the Spanish ambassador to France, the Count of Aranda, to obtain aid. Spain reluctantly channelled arms and supplies through its traders in the 13 colonies, and declared war on Britain in 1779, a year after France.

That summer, the governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez, began making plans for a campaign in west Florida, which was under British control. His eye was on Pensacola, an advantageous port near Spanish New Orleans. On 13 February 1781, he left Havana with a fleet of 20 ships, entering Pensacola Bay less than a month later. The town was soon under siege and by 10 May the British surrendered. Gálvez's victory would become another factor leading to Britain conceding defeat in the Revolutionary War that October. After three years back under French control, in 1803 Louisiana was sold to the United States.

During the early decades of the 19th century, Spain also faced rebelling colonies, and by the 1820s a number of republics had



Divide and rule

A sign in west Texas in 1949. Racial segregation, which applied to African-American and Hispanic people, was common in Texas from the 1890s →

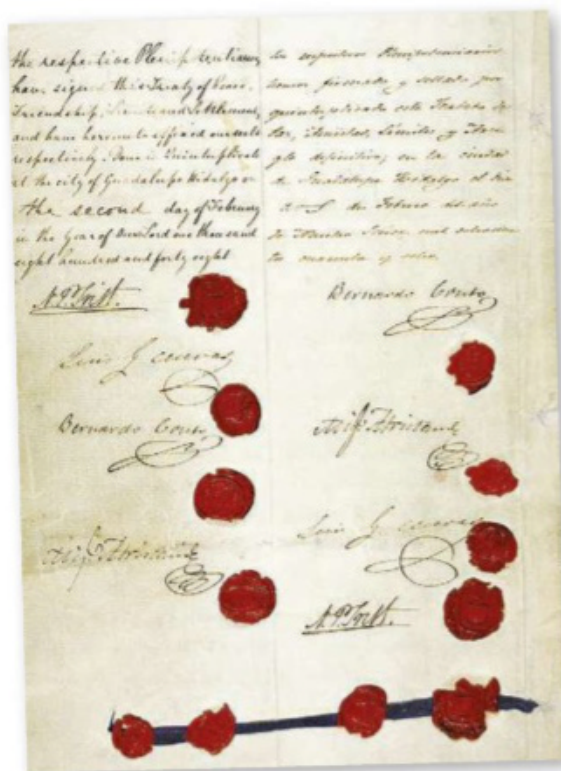
joined the US in declaring independence, leaving Spain with Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. The political configuration of the western hemisphere had been transformed, with the young United States going from strength to strength, pushing into the west and the south.

Forgotten struggles

After achieving independence in 1821, the government of Mexico (formerly New Spain) was eager to populate its northern frontier, which had long been subject to attacks from Native Americans. Although wary of the designs of its Anglo-American neighbours to the north – there were valuable mines in Mexico – in the 1820s it granted land to people willing to settle in this region, some of them from the US, where debate over slavery was intensifying. Mexico wanted to ban the use of enslaved people, but Anglo settlers who were profiting on cotton grown by slaves rebelled and in 1836 declared the Republic of Texas. In 1844, US presidential candidate James K Polk ran on a platform of national expansion, expressed in the tenet of ‘manifest destiny’. After assuming the presidency the following year, Polk annexed Texas as a state in 1846 and turned his gaze towards Mexico. The resulting Mexican-American War had a profound impact on the life of that newspaper editor Ramírez and many like him.

After the war, and the acquisition of vast swathes of new territory, the United States was faced with an internal conflict – the fight over slavery, a major factor in the outbreak of the Civil War (1861–65), which continues to dominate the nation’s historical landscape. As the complex rebuilding of the United States began, so too did the refashioning of its history, positioning national

Feeding the debate about immigration is an abiding public belief that the United States is somehow different from its neighbours



Seals of approval
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which ended the Mexican-American war and added 1.36 million km² of territory to the United States

identity around a common Anglo-Saxon starting point, underpinned by Protestantism. As immigration from the Mediterranean grew in the 19th century, this form of Anglo national identity continued to dominate, overshadowing Catholic Italians and Portuguese; the ‘black legend’ of the cruel barbarity of the Spanish Conquistadors also continued to linger.

The long, complex Spanish history of what’s now the United States largely faded from public memory, but it re-emerged at the end of the 19th century in a significantly repackaged form. Florida and California, with their appealing sunny climates, bookended this new, commodified version of the Hispanic past. Versions of this past appeared in many guises, from the melodramatic, bestselling 1884 novel *Ramona*, set among the ruins of the Spanish mission churches in California, to the ‘Fountain of Youth’ site in St Augustine, Florida, touted as the spot where Ponce de León landed in 1513.

Underneath the sentimentalised surface, though, darker changes were afoot. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who had long lived in the lands that were ceded to the US in 1848 encountered growing social prejudices, as did others who immigrated north from Latin America. Some restaurants did not serve Mexicans, and many cinemas forced their Hispanic clientele to sit separately from Anglos. Many people in the ceded territory had been swindled out of their land, or lost it after lengthy court battles. Hispanic communities also lived in fear of lynching.

Francisco P Ramírez foresaw what lay ahead, writing in *El Clamor Público* that the law in the United States only “served to widen the gap that has existed for some time between the foreigners and the natives”. Arguably, that gap has never been closed. Latinx people from a range of backgrounds have been forced to continue to fight for equality.

Today, a heated debate rages over the issue of immigration, especially from central America. Feeding into this is an abiding public belief that the US is somehow different from its neighbours – yet the entire hemisphere was shaped by the same forces: European incursion, the destruction of indigenous communities, the enslavement of African people, political rebellions and the formation of modern republics. Indeed, the US is now home to the second-largest Spanish-speaking population in the world, after Mexico. If there is to ever be a connected future between the US and its neighbours, it must start with an understanding of their shared past. ●

Carrie Gibson is a historian and author. Her new book is *El Norte: The Epic and Forgotten Story of Hispanic North America* (Grove Press UK, 2019)

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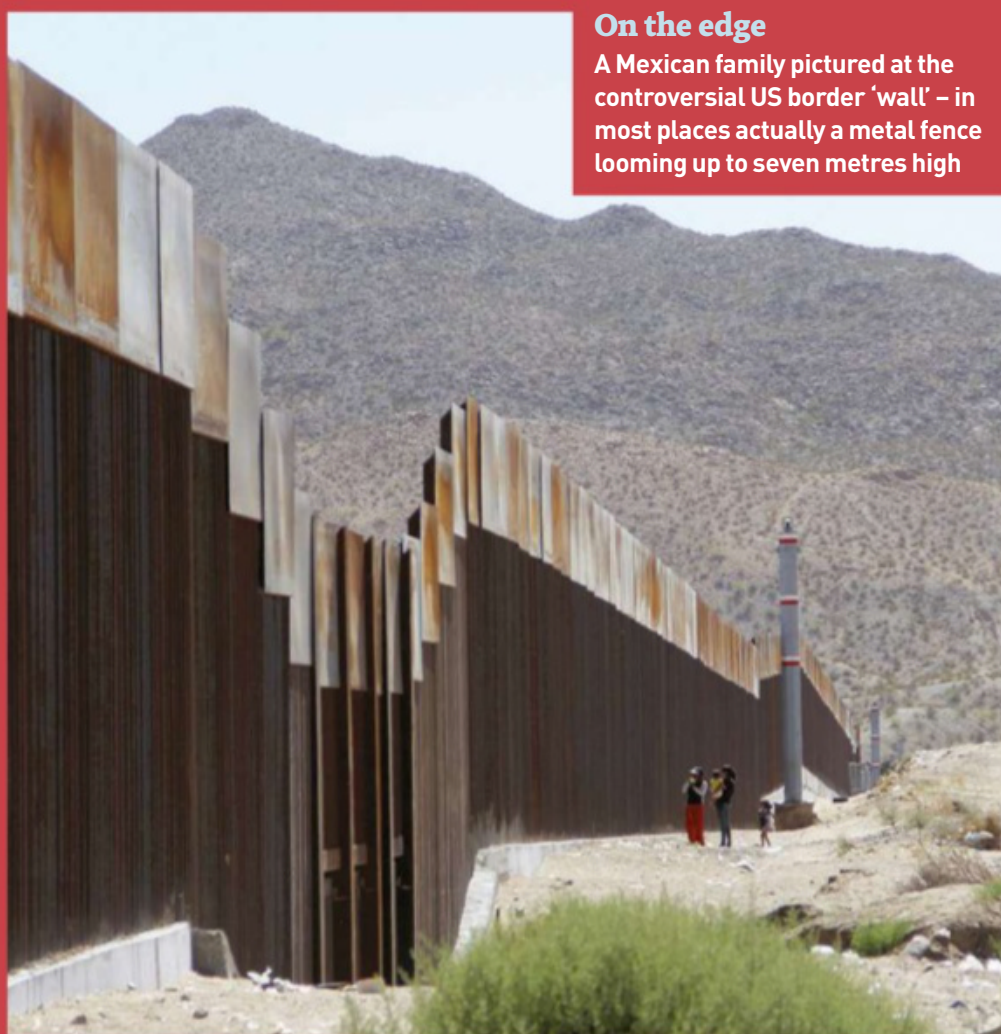
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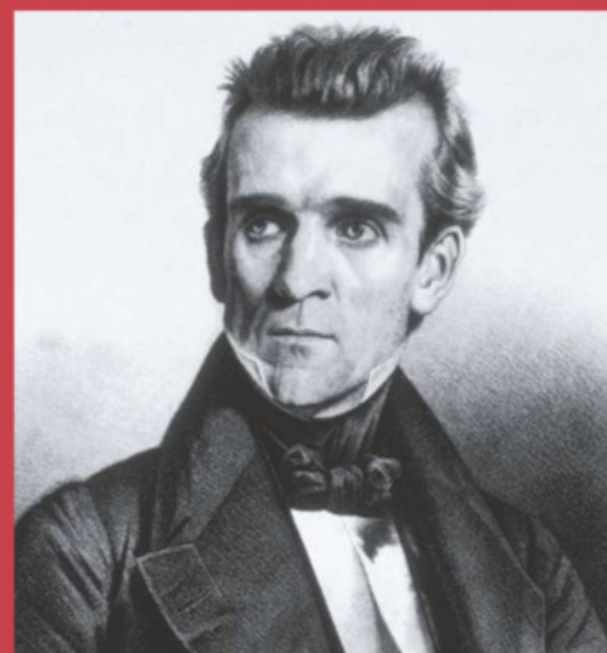
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We are all immigrants
 Mexicans in Los Angeles celebrate their Independence Day on 16 September 2018. More than 11 million Mexicans were living in the US in 2017



On the edge
 A Mexican family pictured at the controversial US border 'wall' – in most places actually a metal fence looming up to seven metres high



'Manifest destiny'
 James K Polk, 11th president of the United States, pictured around 1838. His 1844 election campaign was run on a platform of national expansion, expressed in the idea of 'manifest destiny'. After his election as president he vastly extended the country's territory at the expense of Mexico

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THE LONG READ

The complex history of concentration camps

We must be cautious about what we label a concentration camp – but must also not let confusion cloud the real issues

BY DAN STONE



Migrants at a detention centre in Texas, March 2019. In gauging if such facilities are 'concentration camps', we must explore that term's historical meaning

R

Recent years have witnessed a noticeable growth in the use of camps of all sorts across the world. There are refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in nations bordering Syria; in the UK there are Immigration Removal Centres in places such as Harmondsworth. At the other end of the scale, there is a large camp system in North Korea about which we know very little. There has also been much recent concern that so-called ‘re-education camps’ in China holding people of the Uighur ethnic group

are being used to separate families. Following a fact-finding mission to Myanmar, international human rights lawyer Chris Sidoti has said that Rohingya Muslims are being held in concentration camps.

The camp phenomenon is increasing, but what specifically denotes a *concentration* camp? These are places of horror and dehumanisation, sites where civilians are extracted from ‘normal’ society and held against their will. Most important, they are installations where the rule of law has been abandoned – where the inmates have no means of contesting their incarceration.

Despite this increasing prevalence of camps around the world, the revelations this summer about the conditions of migrants detained on the border between Mexico and the US state of Texas have sparked particular condemnation. An internal US watchdog report published in July, on facilities in the Rio Grande area, Texas, highlighted “dangerous overcrowding”, with photographs showing 71 men in a cell designed for 41 women. Pennsylvania Representative Madeleine Dean tweeted that conditions were “far worse than we ever could have imagined”.



As well as the specific conditions in these US-Mexico border facilities, their very existence has sparked debate. A volatile political issue intensified when US representative and Democratic politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez referred to them as “concentration camps”. “The US is running concentration camps on our southern border, and that is exactly what they are,” she said in an Instagram Live video. “I want to talk to the people that are concerned enough with humanity to say that... ‘never again’ means something.” She went on to write: “This administration has established concentration camps on the southern border of the United States for immigrants, where they are being brutalised with dehumanising conditions and dying. This is not hyperbole. It is the conclusion of expert analysis.” She cited the work of Andrea Pitzer, author of the 2017 book *One Long Night: A Global*



Protests in Turkey against ‘re-education camps’ in China, which reports claim are used to separate Uighur families

When people think of concentration camps, they think of the Holocaust

History of Concentration Camps, who has asserted that the camps on the border fall within her definition of that term.

Ocasio-Cortez's comments, understandably, sparked strong reactions. When a member of its staff tweeted in support of Ocasio-Cortez, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) issued a statement in which it "unequivocally" rejected any form of "Holocaust analogy" and specifically rejected "recent attempts to analogise the situation on the United States southern border to concentration camps in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s". Alan Dershowitz, emeritus professor at Harvard Law School, went even further, claiming that Ocasio-Cortez's assertions made her a Holocaust denier. This seemingly bizarre claim rests, one assumes, on a logical extension of the USHMM's objections to "Holocaust analogies" – as if even to suggest that the Holocaust might be considered in the same breath as other genocides or human rights violations somehow downplays or denies altogether the significance of the Nazis' genocide against the Jews. In response to Ocasio-Cortez's claims, President Trump himself tweeted that "The Border Patrol, they are great people, they are patriots, they love our country". The Border Patrol has rejected critics' claims, as has the Republican Party. Very few Republicans are willing to criticise the border facilities, just as, more recently, the large majority have failed to reject Trump's attacks on 'the squad', the four congresswomen of colour (including Ocasio-Cortez) whom he regards as unpatriotic because of their critical stance.

Unsurprisingly, the back and forth of social media and op-ed columns has seen many vicious attacks as well as some more considered pieces, notably by Pitzer and by fellow historians Waitman Wade Beorn, Emma Kuby and Timothy Snyder.

What's interesting is that Ocasio-Cortez did not directly reference the Holocaust, although her use of the 'never again' slogan, along with an image of a Holocaust memorial featuring the phrase in several languages, suggests that is what she had in mind. The furious response to her tweet, however, indicates that when most people hear the words 'concentration camp', they think of the Holocaust.

There are two problems with this reaction and, therefore, some of the outrage that greeted her comments. First, the connection between the mass extermination of the Jewish people and the concept of the concentration camp does not tell the whole story of the horror of the Holocaust. Second, concentration camps have a far longer and more complicated history than their use by the Nazis during the Second World War. Only through understanding both of these histories can we begin to make sense of what seem to be similar institutions today.



As historian Timothy Snyder has noted, most Jewish people did not see a concentration camp in the Second World War. Jews were present in Nazi concentration camps from the system's inception in 1933, but only in large numbers at specific moments (such as after the November Pogrom, or *Kristallnacht*, of 1938). Some



US politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose comparison of detention centres in the United States to historic camps caused much debate



The entrance to the Nazi Auschwitz I camp. The infamous Auschwitz complex is at the heart of much present-day confusion about what constitutes a concentration camp, argues Dan Stone

40% of the Holocaust's victims were killed face-to-face, shot into pits close to their homes in eastern Europe. In just one instance, at the Babi Yar ravine just outside the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, more than 33,000 Jewish people were massacred across two days in September 1941. Most of the rest of the victims of the Holocaust died by asphyxiation in the death camps in Nazi-occupied Poland.

As such, the Holocaust was, for the most part, separate from the SS's regular concentration-camp system. We can attribute the confusion that has grown on this subject to the most famous of the Nazi camps: Auschwitz. Rather than being a single facility, it was actually three camps. Auschwitz I was

a concentration camp, originally intended to house political prisoners. Auschwitz II-Birkenau was a death camp, primarily designed for killing people. Auschwitz III (Monowitz) was a slave-labour sub-camp set up to staff a nearby factory. Monowitz was also the administrative centre for a large number of other slave-labour sub-camps, the names of which (such as Blechhammer, Janinagrube and Eintrachthütte) have largely been forgotten.

Because Auschwitz was in existence almost until the end of the Second World War, many months after the Operation Reinhard death camps (Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka) were closed down in 1943, and because tens of thousands of inmates had passed through it and been transferred elsewhere, there were lots of witnesses from across the whole of Europe. And, even though it had been largely evacuated by the time the Red Army liberated it in January 1945, the huge camp and some 7,650 of its inmates who had been left behind were still there to be seen.

The point at which the Holocaust and the concentration-camp system really converged was at the very end of the Second World War. In January 1945, there were 714,000 recorded inmates of the SS concentration-camp system, a figure that doesn't include every camp in Germany (and excludes forced labourers working in factories across the Third Reich). About a third of these died on the so-called 'death marches', when evacuees from camps in the east – many of them Jews – were forcibly marched to others still in existence in Germany and Austria to avoid them being captured alive by the Red Army. Such people were made to travel huge distances in the middle of winter, with minimal food or shelter. If they couldn't keep up, they were shot or left to die on the roadside. This explains why there was a massive overcrowding of desperately ill people in places such as Belsen in March and April 1945. Because of the disastrous conditions in those camps, they began functioning as death camps, even though they hadn't been set up for that purpose.



Those are the main causes of the present-day confusion between the Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews and their use of a system of concentration camps. It's a confusion that only really started about 20 years after the end of the Second World War. Before that point, western Europeans didn't think only of Jews when they talked about concentration camps, but also of political resistors, or other groups of deportees such as forced labourers. As people became increasingly aware of the Nazi murder of the Jews, confusion also, ironically, grew about that policy of extermination and its implementation. And, as the Holocaust has turned into

a universal symbol of evil over the past 40 years, some of the complexities of the history of concentration camps were forgotten.

Indeed, the fact that the existence of concentration camps pre-dates the Third Reich – and the fact that the Nazis didn't invent the term – means the idea that we should be outraged purely by its use today is ahistorical. It tells us more about the resonances the phrase has today, which are very different from those it would have had in earlier times and in other places.

As is the case with all contested concepts, the precise origins of the term 'concentration camp' are debated. The Spanish in Cuba, and the Americans in the Philippines, created so-called 'zones of concentration' at the end of the 19th century. Despite the similarity in names, however, we should be cautious. Andreas Stucki, a historian at the University of Bern, argued in the *Journal of Genocide Research* in 2018 that these two cases have been incorporated into the wider history of the subject more because of semantics than the nature of what actually happened. In the case of Cuba, large numbers of people were relocated from what was considered to be a guerrilla war zone. Famous images showing starving, ill-cared-for people seem to reflect modern concepts of concentration camps, yet these were not really camps but, rather, regions to which civilians had been relocated, and we would be hard-pressed to fit them into the same historical category.

Historians have noted that the British created 'concentration camps' in South Africa during the Second Boer War (1899–1902). They were used as a means of isolating those Boer civilians believed by the British to be aiding the guerrilla fighters – providing them with supplies and food, and helping them melt back into the general population when they weren't fighting. The camps in South Africa, in which conditions were shocking and an estimated 48,000 died, have similarities with those created less than two decades later for civilian refugees and internees during the First World War. The latter facilities weren't called 'concentration camps' – except in the sarcastic comments of inmates – but are particularly worthy of mention because they mark the first large-scale internment of civilians on European soil.

This speaks of a kind of state paranoia, and of a fear of foreigners owing allegiance to a different state – both of which have become commonplace today but which, at the start of the 20th century, were new phenomena. These camps are also interesting because they normalised the idea of statelessness: of abandoning people so that they no longer have any state protection. In this sense, there's a case to be made that the Soviet Gulag and other camps created by communist regimes might also justifiably be called concentration camps. So, too, might British camps in Kenya set up to hold Mau Mau 'rebels' in the 1950s, and camps set up under South American dictatorships in the 20th century.

Other historical examples of similar camps also fit this pattern. The internment of Italians and German-Jewish refugees in Britain at the start of the Second World War is one instance; an even clearer case is the internment of Japanese-Americans during the same conflict. These latter were people who had done

Boer families in a British camp in Eshowe, in what is now KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in 1900 during the Second Boer War. Held in appalling conditions at the camp, many people died



GETTY IMAGES

First World War camps marked the first large-scale internment of civilians on European soil



Japanese-American children during a class in Minidoka War Relocation Center, Idaho, 1943. Inmates at such facilities were held against their will, but had access to post offices and schools

Such internment reveals the paranoia at the heart of many modern states. We now see the same paranoia in the US

nothing wrong, but who came under suspicion by the US government of owing allegiance to an enemy state simply by virtue of being Japanese. Again, though, the history is complicated. The camps in which they were held, such as Tanforan and Minidoka, are regularly referred to as ‘concentration camps’, yet – despite the fact their inmates were held against their will – they had facilities such as post offices and visiting hours. Clearly, they were a far cry from Nazi camps such as Dachau.

Yet here is the point: whether or not the facilities in which Japanese-Americans were held were concentration camps is less important than understanding that their internment reveals the paranoia that lies at the heart of many modern states. Further, it’s exactly the same paranoia that we now see in the United States, in the response of President Trump’s administration to migration from Latin America to the US.



As such, these ideas – of statelessness and state paranoia – speak to a wider historical story. As president, Trump clearly has enormous power and influence over these kinds of decisions. But the camps in the US of 2019 tell us not just about the attitude of a particular administration but about the temper of the times more generally. They exist not just because people with particular views are speaking louder. They also have to be operationalised by regimes that believe their actions will win them political capital.

Such camps can, therefore, usefully be seen as a kind of symptom of political disruption, and of wider structural and geopolitical issues: the movement of peoples, the perceived transfer of power from rich countries to developing countries, and the effects of climate change on nations around the world. These circumstances are putting pressure on resources and on states to provide for ‘their’ populations in ways that are feeding this kind of paranoia. And so the people of a land such as the US, which is built on immigrants, increasingly express the idea that they have to keep migrants out because they’re threatening ‘their’ livelihoods.

In other words, it’s not just because there are lots of people who don’t like foreigners that we see the growing use of detention centres; it’s because people feel that their ways of life are somehow under threat, and that these foreigners are icebreakers for a larger, oncoming change. All of these large-scale phenomena feed through into the rise of xenophobia and nationalism, and the sorts of sentiment that many people hoped, in the decades after the Second World War, were dead.

We should be cautious about attempting to identify too strongly a recurring pattern. This isn’t exactly the same phenomenon repeating through history. But it is symptomatic of the fact that moments of crisis (or perceived crisis) lead states to behave in certain ways. The report of conditions at the facility at Clint, Texas – children with their own bodily waste on their clothes, people drinking toilet water, guards mocking the inmates – is reminiscent of some conditions at concentration camps. As in concentration camps in other settings, these phenomena are not a

result of the US Border Control being unable to afford to house people properly; in fact, there are empty beds in longer-term Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities. It seems, rather, that despite President Trump's insistence he is merely trying to persuade would-be migrants not to travel to the US, we are witnessing a policy of humiliation. Although the conditions in China's camps holding Uighur people are no less outrageous, such occurrences seem to us more frightening when supposedly liberal states act in a similar way. Where is left to hide? Whose rights are not at risk?



Of course, a liberal state such as the United States allows for opposition in a way that is not permitted in authoritarian regimes. There are plenty of people publishing outraged comments about what's going on in the US, as well as those who argue that any comparison between the detention centres and concentration camps is unfounded. There is much historical precedent for dissent: the British humanitarian activist Emily Hobhouse, for instance, campaigned to highlight and change the conditions of women and children in Boer War concentration camps. Conditions did improve, but not before tens of thousands died in the camps.

Still, it's important to phrase such criticism carefully. Ocasio-Cortez's words may have done her argument a disservice, because they refocused the debate to one about terminology. Historians are obliged to stress that the various examples discussed in this piece (and many more could be added) are not all the same: they occurred at different times, in different places, and were administered by different regimes with differing ideologies. So although in some ways it could be argued that it's entirely reasonable to use the term 'concentration camp' in the case of the facilities on the US border – because it's been used to describe all sorts of sites of incarceration throughout the 20th and 21st centuries – it needs qualification, and the claim is inherently risky.

I would argue that, when we consider the examples considered here, the term 'concentration camp' has always connoted – as we have defined – the forced detention of civilians against their will, who are denied access to basic rights most of us take for granted, including recourse to law. The civilians held in concentration camps are completely at the mercy of the guards and of the regime by which they are imprisoned. Unlike at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp in Cuba – for all of the horrific treatment there – they have no access to law. No one represents them.

Aside from the instinctive reaction that wrongly associates concentration camps solely with the Holocaust, much of this debate turns on whether one can find an adequate definition of a concentration camp. The fact that, like any concept that has a long history, such an attempt is so fraught with historical and political risks means that we are less in need of a consensual, timeless definition than of the need to understand that it is a term that has, at different moments in time, connoted different things. The term 'concentration camp' has a broader conceptual history that we need to understand to make sense of the situation in the present day. Rather than obsess over whether the detention centres on the US/Mexico border are 'concentration camps', we should be outraged that such places with such appalling conditions exist at all, housing not criminals but enterprising people who – in the tradition of American history and nation-building – seek a better life for themselves and their children. 🌐

Dan Stone is professor of modern history at Royal Holloway University of London, and author of *Concentration Camps: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2019)



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➡ Escape the quake

Japanese people clutch whatever possessions they can carry as they flee from the devastation caused by a major earthquake in Fukui prefecture on 28 June 1948. The 6.8 magnitude quake brought down 60% of the buildings in the Fukui plain, many of them too hastily constructed after bombing during the Second World War; 3,769 people died and more than 22,000 were injured. Thousands of farmers were spared because the quake struck in the late afternoon, when most were in the fields.

A YEAR IN PICTURES

1948

Earthquakes and emigration, art and apartheid

In the period following the Second World War, tensions simmered in the Middle East, China, Korea, India and Germany. **Richard Overy** explores key events in a year in which healthcare, abstract art and emigration also made headlines ➡



➡ **New life on the ocean wave**

Cheery child emigrants wave for the camera as they sail aboard the liner RMS *Ormonde* from Britain to Australia. These youngsters travelled to Western Australia, where they settled in the Fairbridge Farm School in Pinjarra; this scheme facilitated many child migrants during the 20th century. After the horrors of the Second World War, thousands of British people (dubbed ‘Ten Pound Poms’ because of the reduced fares charged) chose to start a new life in the ‘white Commonwealth’ of Australia, New Zealand and Canada; the *Ormonde* was one of several ships chartered for this mass wave of migration.

⬇ **The NHS is born**

An infant is weighed during a health check in Bootle, Merseyside, shortly after the formal launch of the British National Health Service in July 1948. The new system, implemented by the postwar Labour government, promised medical treatment free for all at the point of delivery. Babies and infants now qualified for progress checks at clinics, and mothers could seek advice on caring for their children. Improved child health was one of the great achievements of the new NHS.



GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO



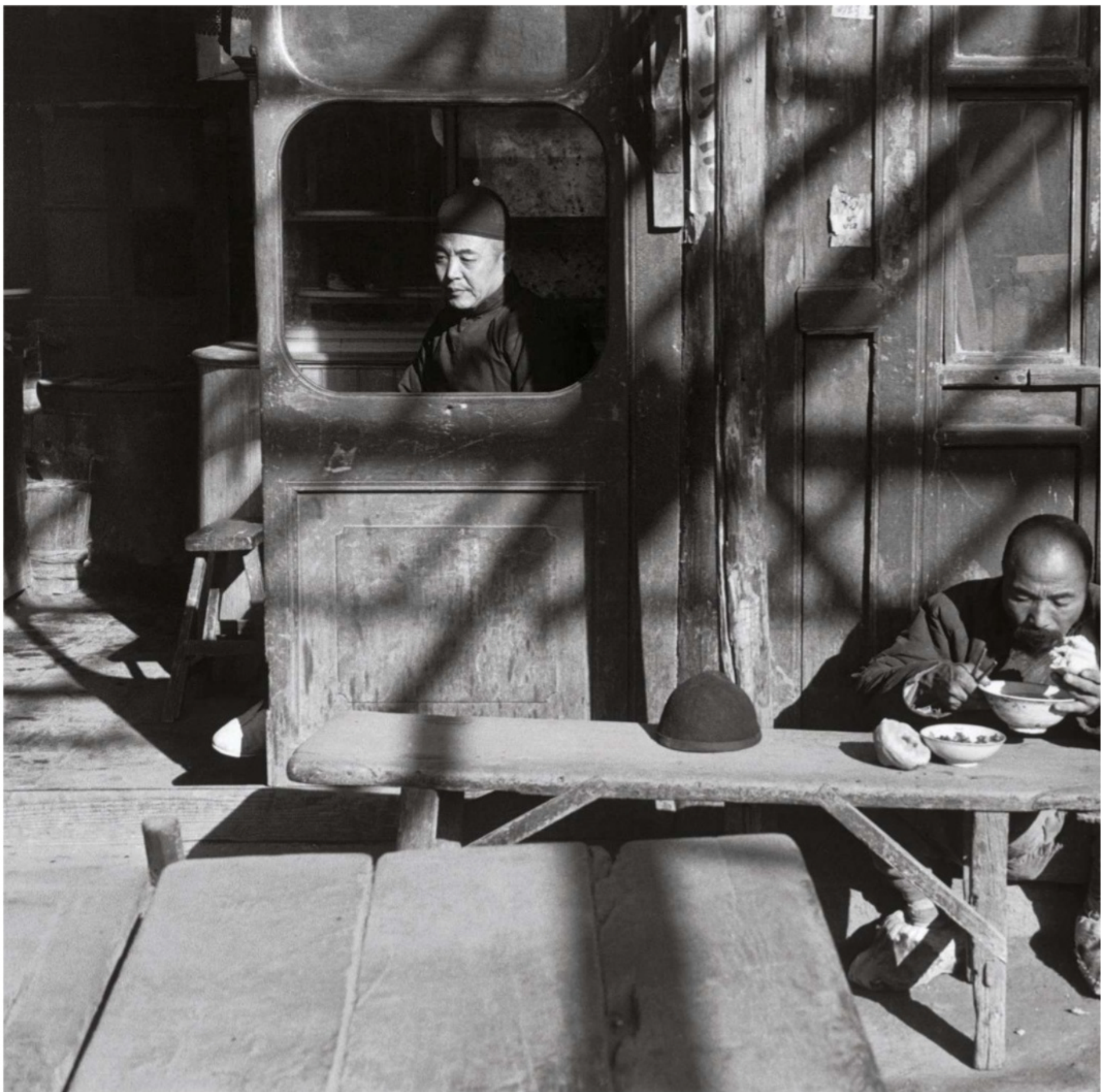
⬆ A city at war

A British soldier stands guard between the Arab and Jewish quarters of Jerusalem during the civil war wracking Palestine in 1947–48. The conflict had been sparked when Palestinian and Arab groups rejected a UN proposal to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states; British forces stationed in the mandated territory were subjected to violence from both sides during this time. Britain began withdrawing its troops from Palestine from 1947, finally giving up the mandate on 15 May 1948; the independent state of Israel had been declared under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion on 14 May. The last British troops departed the region on 30 June, but by then Arab armies from Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq had invaded, leading to many more months of fighting.

➡ Launch of a new Korea

Crowds celebrate the inauguration of the First Republic of Korea at the Government-General Building in Seoul on 15 August 1948, in front of new president Syngman Rhee. After the Second World War, the Korean peninsula had been divided along the 38th parallel, with Soviet forces occupying the north and the US Army governing the south. On 9 September 1948, the communist-ruled Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established in the north, led by Kim Il-sung. Two years later, the north invaded the south; in 1953, at the end of a three-year war, the states remained divided.





📍 China crisis

A shopkeeper peers from his empty store at a peasant eating his provisions in a Beijing street in December 1948, in the final months of rule by Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Guomindang regime. Mao Zedong's communist armies had triumphed in northern China in the civil war that caused massive disruption to the economy, widespread poverty and hunger. The shopkeeper has nothing to sell and the peasant's traditional marketplace is gone; in the end, neither would benefit from Mao Zedong's social revolution, launched with the founding of the People's Republic on 21 September 1949.



⬆ Seeing in black and white

The Afrikaner National Party leader Daniel François Malan (1874–1959) is hoisted aloft by enthusiastic supporters in Johannesburg following victory in the 1948 general election in South Africa. Under Malan's leadership, the new government introduced a range of sweeping changes to enforce apartheid, separating white South Africans from so-called 'coloured' and black people. Opposition to these policies sparked a 40-year struggle to establish democracy and civil rights for the country's large non-white majority.

⬆ Plotting a course to recovery

A poster by Dutch illustrator Reyn Dirksen for the European Recovery Program, an initiative launched under US secretary of state George Marshall in 1948 to provide aid for European countries struggling with postwar economic recovery. But all colours were not on the mast: the Soviet Union refused to allow satellite states to participate in the 'Marshall Plan' by which the US gave over \$12 billion in aid to Europe.





◉ **India mourns the Mahatma**
Crowds numbering an estimated one million line the route of the funeral cortège of Mahatma Gandhi, figurehead of the Indian independence campaign, as it heads towards Delhi's cremation ghat on the Yamuna river on 31 January 1948. He had been assassinated the previous day by Nathuram Godse, a fanatical Hindu nationalist angered by Gandhi's attempts to accommodate the needs of India's Muslims during the country's partition the year before.

BRIDGEMAN

➡ Making a splash

Silver over Black, White, Yellow and Red, painted by American artist Jackson Pollock in 1948, symbolises the shift to an art form stressing colour and movement at the expense of form. Pollock (1912–56) was in the vanguard of postwar artists experimenting with extreme forms of abstract art; his so-called ‘action painting’ technique involved splattering paint over canvases spread on the floor. The apparent randomness of this process was misleading – in fact, Pollock spent hours filling in lines, or dripping paint in deliberate patterns on the canvas.



⬇ Epic mistake

A poster for Victor Fleming’s 1948 film *Joan of Arc* shows Ingrid Bergman as the eponymous French heroine. The 145-minute epic attracted poor reviews and lost money due to production costs, despite its commercial success. Its director – who had enjoyed great success with *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* – was said to have wept from shame on viewing the final cut. The film, and Bergman’s career, faltered when news broke of the married actor’s affair with Italian director Roberto Rossellini. Two months after the movie’s general release, Fleming suffered a fatal heart attack. 🌐



Richard Overy

is professor of history at the University of Exeter, editor of *The Times Complete History of the World* (William Collins, 2015), and historical consultant on the upcoming BBC One drama series *World on Fire*



BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

⬆ General in the dock

Japan’s wartime prime minister and military commander, General Hideki Tojo, is tried at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo, on charges including crimes against peace and crimes against humanity. The trial found Hideki guilty on all but two counts; on 12 November 1948 he, along with six other defendants, was sentenced to be hanged. He was executed on 23 December 1948.

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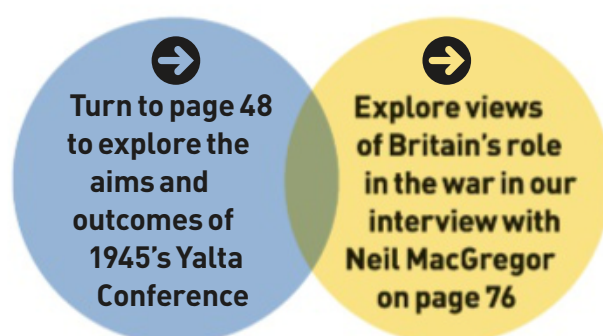
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Why can't we escape the grip of the Second World War?

The last great global conflict ended three-quarters of a century ago – yet still casts a long shadow over international politics, economics, religion and media. Eight experts discuss why the war continues to exert such a powerful influence



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

“Today, the Second World War is a series of myths and memories that entrench old ideas and old power structures”

Keith Lowe



In 1944, the renowned British economist John Maynard Keynes gave a landmark speech at the famous Bretton Woods conference. The Allies, he said, had proven that they could fight together; now it was time to show they could also live together. If they could achieve this, a genuine “brotherhood of man” was within their grasp.

The Second World War was such a vast catastrophe that by 1944 the need for global change was obvious to everyone. At Bretton Woods, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and an element of the World Bank were created to promote peace and prosperity, and to prevent the kind of economic shocks that had led to war in the first place. The United Nations (UN), created the following year, was founded on the same noble principles.

But at the same time as trying to save the world from the scourge of future war, these organisations were also a perfect way to cement the powers and privileges of the major Allies. It was the UK and the United States that set the agenda for Bretton Woods 75 years ago. Since then, the IMF has always been headed by a European, and the World Bank always by an American.

The UN is also in thrall to vested interests. The Security Council is dominated by the five permanent members – the US, the UK, France, Russia and China – whose privileged position is nothing but a throwback to the power structures of 1945. Our collective memory of the war allows us to indulge the idea that nations like Russia are still great powers, and that economic giants such as Germany and Japan do not deserve a leading role in world affairs. Huge emerging powers such as India do not even get a look in.

The Second World War was once a catalyst for global change. Today it is a series of myths and memories that entrench old ideas and old power structures. Our inability to let go of its legacy now prevents us from any progress towards the “brotherhood of man” that, in 1944, even a hard-nosed economist such as Keynes dared to dream of.

Keith Lowe is a historian and author. His latest book is *The Fear and the Freedom: How the Second World War Changed Us* (Viking, 2017)

CHINA

“Reviving memories of China’s wartime experience is a way of creating a new nationalism”

Rana Mitter



History is still current affairs in China. Whether it’s the thoughts of Confucius or the legacy of the violent Opium Wars of the 19th century, China’s past shapes the thinking of its politicians, artists and thinkers. But outside observers sometimes don’t spot one of the parts of the past that has loomed ever larger in popular culture over the past three decades: China’s experience in the Second World War.

China was at war with Japan for eight years from 1937 to 1945, and a formal ally of the United States and the UK after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. During those years, it suffered more than 10 million deaths, saw 80 million or more Chinese forced to flee their homes, and experienced the destruction of its still fledgling systems of railways and roads. The war created the basis for the Communist revolution of 1949.

After 1949, there was relatively little mention of the war in Mao’s China. This was because his government found it politically inconvenient to point out that the leader he had defeated in the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek of the Nationalist party, had borne the brunt of the fighting against the Japanese. That taboo began to fade in the 1980s after Mao’s death.

Today, endless soap operas on Chinese television show both Communist and Nationalist warriors in a positive light; what matters is that they are anti-Japanese patriots. China’s internet is awash with keyboard warriors (mostly male, it has to be said) who use text messages to debate the finer points of the battle of Shanghai in 1937 or Taierzhuang in 1938, expressing patriotic sentiments along the way. Schoolchildren are taken in their hundreds of thousands to Beijing’s unsightly named Museum of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.

Today, China provides its people with urban lifestyles unimaginable to previous generations. Reviving memories of China’s wartime experience is a way of creating a new nationalism that speaks to something beyond the attractions of consumerism.

Rana Mitter is professor of the history and politics of modern China at the University of Oxford. Author of *China’s War with Japan, 1937–1945: The Struggle for Survival* (Allen Lane, 2013), he is currently writing a book on war and memory in contemporary China



The Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in Beijing. "Reviving memories of the wartime experience is a way of creating a new nationalism," says Rana Mitter



British economist John Maynard Keynes addresses the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, at which he promoted the idea of a "brotherhood of man". Outcomes included the creation of the World Bank

BRITAIN

"Britain hasn't abandoned Europe; ties run deep – the ties forged in the fight for freedom during the Second World War"

Helen Fry



Britain's decision to leave the European Union is arguably the most dramatic political and economic change since the Second World War, making life in the UK increasingly turbulent since 2016. But looking back across history, there is hope of a positive outcome.

During the Second World War, MI9, a branch of British military intelligence, ran clandestine escape lines across Nazi-occupied western Europe (and elsewhere) to bring Allied airmen and soldiers back to Britain. MI9 could succeed only because of the thousands of Belgian, Dutch and French citizens who risked their own lives. These helpers ran the escape lines, acting as couriers or guides taking escapees into neutral Spain and Portugal. It was a dangerous game, rife with betrayal and Gestapo informers. These men and women fought a clandestine war for liberation and democracy and, in so doing, established pan-European links that have become a positive legacy of the conflict.

The world can't escape the grip of the Second World War precisely because today we are witnessing power struggles that have their roots in the reshaping of Europe's borders in 1945. Tensions have arisen in recent years in countries that were once part of the Soviet Union and which became democracies at the end of the Cold War. Russia's present-day designs on Ukraine and its former satellite states – specifically its annexation of Crimea – are examples of an ideological power struggle between democracy and a totalitarian regime that threatens to recast the borders of Europe. And, recently, instability has wracked Hong Kong (once under British rule) over fears of Beijing-imposed restrictions on democracy.

The history of MI9 teaches us, though, that all is not lost. Britain has not abandoned Europe. Ties remain: the same ties forged in the fight for freedom during the Second World War. Below the surface, MI9's legacy is etched into the consciousness of those countries occupied by the Nazis before and during that conflict. Britain's new independence could enable her to be the guardian of democracy should the unthinkable ever happen again.

Helen Fry is a historian and author. Her latest book is *The Walls Have Ears: The Greatest Intelligence Operation of World War II* (Yale, 2019)



THE HOLOCAUST

“We continue to talk about the Holocaust because the genocide of Europe’s Jews has enormous contemporary resonance”

Rebecca Clifford



The Second World War continues to resonate widely today – and perhaps the most intensely examined subject is the Holocaust. In novels and films, in memorials and in the classroom, we constantly encounter its history and memory. Only a rare person in 21st-century Britain could be unaware of the basic details of the attempt, by

the Nazis and their collaborators, to annihilate Europe’s Jewish populations during the Second World War.

However, this was not always the case. In fact, the term ‘Holocaust’ (as we use it now) entered common parlance only in the 1970s, and the widespread commemoration of the Holocaust, which is now part of the fabric of contemporary Western societies, developed in the 1990s.

It was the specific context of the end of the Cold War that led to this shift. During the Cold War, when Western countries were locked into an alliance against the Soviet bloc, it was politically difficult to have a public discussion about war-era crimes against humanity, because Germany was a key ally.

This changed as the Cold War ended after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the crimes against civilian populations that were one of the hallmarks of the Second World War entered powerfully into public discourse.

The 1990s was a key decade in terms of the public memory of the Holocaust, but that was nearly 30 years ago. Why, then, do we continue to talk so much about the Holocaust? The simple answer is that the genocide of Europe’s Jews has enormous contemporary resonance.

Over the past two years, we have seen the return of populist politics globally, often accompanied by xenophobia, racism and a general rise in intolerance against ethnic minority groups. At the same time, we have seen that anti-Semitism remains very much alive on both the extreme right and the extreme left – and as long as that is the case, we will fail to escape the grip of the Second World War. We are all too aware of where such ideas end.

Rebecca Clifford is associate professor of modern history at Swansea University. Her new book, *Orphans of the Storm: Children After the Holocaust*, will be published by Yale University Press in 2020

UNITED STATES

“The American narrative is heroic – the country strides in to rescue Britain, arm Russia and liberate Europe – and satisfying”

Henry Hemming



In 2017 – shortly before Remembrance Day, 11 November (known in the United States as Veterans Day) – the *Guardian* columnist Simon Jenkins called for an alternative: “a Forgetting Day, a Move On Day, a Fresh Start Day”. Unsurprisingly, his proposal fell on deaf ears.

Eighty years on, most countries involved in the Second World War remain

fixated by this particular conflict – especially the United States. It is taught extensively in American high schools. Many museums across the US are devoted to it, while many more allocate it generous space in their displays. Each year, thousands of new studies are published on the subject, while novelists continue to choose it as a historical backdrop.

But it is on screen that the scale of America’s obsession with the Second World War becomes clear. Aside from the large number of television dramas and documentaries produced each year, there are now so many feature films on the subject – most of them American-made – that the full list spans multiple Wikipedia pages. And this is not about to change. After tailing off in the late 20th century, the number of films about the Second World War produced each year is climbing again.

Why can’t the US escape the grip of the Second World War? Mainly because of the way this story is told. The American narrative is not only heroic – the country strides in to rescue Britain, arm Russia and liberate Europe – it is also satisfying, with justice meted out to the Japanese in response to the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. In addition, this conflict seems to be imbued with Manichean clarity. Unlike modern-day wars on drugs or terror, there is no ambiguity about where or who the bad guys are, and when or how the conflict ends.

In our more fractured Trumpian age, perhaps the overwhelming allure of the Second World War is that it allows us to remember a time when millions of Americans set aside their political differences and came together as one.

Henry Hemming is an author specialising in history and spying. His new book is *Our Man in New York: The British Plot to Bring America into the Second World War* (Quercus, 2019)



Jews in the Łódź ghetto, established by the German occupiers of Poland in February 1940, from where tens of thousands were deported to extermination camps. "The genocide of Europe's Jews has enormous contemporary resonance," says Rebecca Clifford



A publicity image from the blockbuster movie *Pearl Harbor* (2001), recreating the Japanese attack in 1941 that prompted the US to join the Second World War. "After tailing off in the late 20th century, the number of films about the war produced each year is climbing again," says Henry Hemming



RUSSIA

“Russian authorities today use the ‘Great Patriotic War’ as an antidote to public protest”

Robert Service



Every country that took a direct part in the war has continuing memories of its traumas, and the Russian Federation is no exception. In each of Russia’s big cities an ‘Immortal Regiment’ parade is held each 9 May, in which family members carry photos of parents and grandparents to show pride in their wartime valour; the president of Russia, Vladimir

Putin, himself usually joins the throngs in Moscow.

The current Kremlin administration prolongs the preoccupation with the war that prevailed under communism. The difference is that, whereas Marxism-Leninism was the central pivot of state ideology until the late 1980s, today’s rulers now choose to focus on Russian achievements during 1941–45. The dates are important. The Soviet Union did not enter the struggle against the Third Reich until it was attacked by Germany – indeed, Stalin and Hitler were allies in all but word before the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union. Once invaded, however, the country survived extraordinary tribulations before sending its armies to Berlin and overthrowing the Nazis. It was the Red Army that broke the spine of the Third Reich.

At a time when Russian people have lasting material and social complaints, the Russian authorities use the ‘Great Patriotic War’ as an antidote to public protest. Putin and his ministers like to bathe in the patriotic sunlight. They tend to downplay the role played by the other peoples of the Soviet Union who resisted Nazism, and emphasise Russian – not Soviet – patriotism. They also use the wartime annals of Russia’s soldiers, sailors, intelligence agents and factory workers to bolster support for the military initiatives that the Kremlin has taken since 2014 in Crimea, eastern Ukraine and Syria.

The link that binds Russian politicians and the Russian people concerning the Second World War is not an artificial one. But Putin, as Boris Yeltsin did before him, reinforces the connection. As thousands of young Russians take to Moscow streets in anti-Putin demos, the likelihood is that the Kremlin will want to increase its patriotic propaganda – and the memory of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ will remain at its core.

Robert Service is emeritus professor of Russian history at St Antony’s College, University of Oxford, and the author of a number of books. His latest, *Kremlin Winter: Russia and the Second Coming of Vladimir Putin*, will be published in October by Picador



British prime minister Winston Churchill writes a greeting message on a shell. His actions during the Second World War were the focus of *Winston Churchill: The Valiant Years* (ABC/BBC, 1960–61), one of a growing number of epic television series produced after the conflict



Russian president Vladimir Putin joins the Immortal Regiment parade in Moscow, 9 May 2019, honouring wartime valour. “Putin and his ministers like to bathe in the patriotic sunlight,” says Robert Service

AJ LEVY/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

“The extirpation of the most evil regime in history was always going to provide lessons that last for centuries”

Andrew Roberts



We can't escape the grip of the Second World War, because the overall global architecture was created in its wake. Nor should we want to, because it was a virtuous settlement – and the world will bitterly regret the outcome when it has been overthrown by a future generation careless of the sacrifices of 1939–45 and ignorant of the issues involved.

The extirpation of the most evil regime in human history, at the cost of more than 20 million lives, was always going to provide lessons that last for centuries, and in many ways they are as powerful today as ever before. The need for strong defences in the democratic western powers against aggressive totalitarian forces is as important when facing modern China, Russia and Iran as it was in the 1930s when dealing with Germany, Japan and Italy. It is not because of its present economic power that China has a seat on the UN Security Council, but because of the oft-forgotten 15 million Chinese who died fighting forces allied with fascism, and President Franklin D Roosevelt's insistence that China should be represented there.

Our economically open, generally free-trading global architecture was created by late-war conferences such as Dumbarton Oaks and Bretton Woods, with institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade being founded as a direct response to the war and its causes and ravages. It is impossible to appreciate the founding notions of these vital international bodies unless one understands the conflict that gave them birth. Similarly, the bodies that underpin British national security were almost all born in the 1938–49 period dominated by the Second World War, including Nato, GCHQ, the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing operation, Anglo-American nuclear cooperation, and so on.

The Second World War rightly and thankfully shapes our assumptions and the far happier world we live in today. It was of the Boer War that Rudyard Kipling wrote: “We have had no end of a lesson/ It will do us no end of good,” but it is much more true of the Second World War.

Andrew Roberts is a historian and author. His latest book is *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* (Allen Lane, 2018)

MEDIA PORTRAYALS

“The war is remembered as a time Britain put aside differences and pulled together to fight for freedom”

Emma Hanna



In contrast with the First World War, the 1939–45 conflict has been perceived in the UK as a ‘good’ war resulting in the triumph of western democracies over evil fascist regimes. It is therefore unsurprising that memories of the ‘finest hour’ have been frequently invoked in the British media, particularly in times of stress and uncertainty. The fascination with the

Battle of Britain continues, together with the mythology of the Blitz and the now ubiquitous ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ poster (which was never actually deployed during the war but is now seen on mugs, tea towels and countless other products).

Television, in particular, has repeatedly returned to the conflict. After 1945 Britain's television service grew quickly and began to create and co-produce epic documentaries such as *Winston Churchill: The Valiant Years* (ABC/BBC, 1960–61). The major 26-part BBC series *The Great War* (1964) attracted more than eight million British viewers, while *The World at War* (ITV, 1973–74), exploring the Second World War over 26 episodes through the testimony of key participants, was at the time the most expensive British television series ever made.

From the late 1990s, broadcasters crossed established documentary modes with re-enactment, reconstruction and reality. Viewers saw British family life in *The 1940s House* (Channel 4, 2001), and how pilots could be trained in *Spitfire Ace* (Channel 4, 2004) and *Bomber Crew* (Channel 4, 2004). The nostalgic evocation of British society at war provided material for television dramas such as *Foyle's War* (ITV, 2002–15) and comedies including *Dad's Army* (BBC, 1968–77), *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* (BBC, 1974–81) and *Allo 'Allo* (BBC, 1982–92). In comparison, only one comedy series about 1914–18 has been made for mainstream television: *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC, 1989).

The memory of the ‘Great War’ is seen as sacred – a national tragedy that resulted in the loss of a generation for no apparent cause. The Second World War, despite its many hardships and historians' subsequent findings to the contrary, is remembered as a time the nation put aside differences and pulled together to fight for freedom. Since the end of that conflict the media have continued to mine wartime stories for political, social or simply commercial reasons. 🌐

Emma Hanna is a lecturer in the School of History at the University of Kent

The future of Europe is decided at Yalta

In February 1945, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin D Roosevelt met in the Crimea to discuss how to bring about a swift end to the Second World War and shape peace for Europe. **Diana Preston** explores the aims, achievements and legacy of that conference from the viewpoints of the Soviet Union, the UK and the United States

In early February 1945, the Soviet, UK and US leaders – the ‘Big Three’, as the press had dubbed them – arrived at the seaside resort of Yalta in the war-ravaged Crimea peninsula in Ukraine (at that time, a Soviet republic). Over eight days of bargaining, bombast and intermittent bonhomie in the hastily restored Livadia Palace, built by the last tsar of Russia, these three heads of government decided the future of Europe.

Josef Stalin had led the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s, first as general secretary of the Communist Party and then, from 1941, as premier. Winston Churchill had replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister in 1940, and had been the UK’s wartime leader. Franklin D Roosevelt was serving his fourth term as US president, having first

taken office in 1933, but by 1945 his health was declining.

Yalta was the second of three major wartime conferences involving the ‘Big Three’ powers. The first had been held in Tehran in 1943, and the final one was in Potsdam, near Berlin, in July 1945.

Topping the agenda at Yalta was one key conundrum: how to bring the Second World War to a swift conclusion – the only goal that all three leaders truly shared. By the time of the conference, western Allied forces had liberated France and Belgium and were advancing into Germany, and Red Army forces were just 40 miles from Berlin. Defeat for the Nazis was nigh assured – but not the timing or aftermath.

Other issues discussed included the government of a defeated and occupied Germany and the reparations to be extracted from it; the establishment of

a new government and new borders for Poland, the country for which Britain had gone to war; the establishment of a new peacekeeping organisation, the United Nations; the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war; and, finally, but by no means least, the price of Soviet entry into the war against Japan.

In their negotiations, as in the poker games Roosevelt so enjoyed, it was not only the nature of the hand held that was important, but also the players’ characters and the way they played their cards and anticipated, interpreted and manipulated their opponents’ moves.

Each leader had come to Yalta with specific aims and strategies for achieving them – and those goals and tactics were by no means identical.

BRIDGEMAN



Over the following pages we explore Soviet, British and US views of Yalta...



British prime minister Winston Churchill, US president Franklin D Roosevelt and Soviet premier Josef Stalin pose for photographs during the Yalta Conference, 9 February 1945. The 'Big Three' met to discuss how to bring the Second World War to a swift conclusion – but the fallout from the conference had longer-lasting repercussions

“Stalin had his secret police bug Roosevelt and Churchill”

Stalin was probably the best prepared of the three leaders at Yalta. Certainly, he was the clearest about his aims: he wanted to defeat and occupy Germany as quickly as possible. His nagging fear, never fully recognised by either Roosevelt or Churchill, was that his allies might attempt a separate peace deal with Germany – and perhaps even turn their collective armies against him. He had his secret police bug the two palaces in which Roosevelt and Churchill stayed so that every night those agents could report any such intentions to him.

Throughout the conference, Stalin repeatedly stressed the closeness of the alliance between the three powers. He emphasised the blood debt owed by the other two because of the massive loss of life suffered by Soviet forces – many times greater than that of the UK and the US combined. Discussions about the strategy for ending the war reassured Stalin, especially British and US commitments to launch heavy air attacks on Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig and Chemnitz in order to hamper Nazi efforts to transfer troops to the eastern front, and to also cross the river Rhine into Germany in force as soon as weather allowed.

Stalin's next priority was to ensure postwar Soviet dominance over eastern Europe. He wanted a cordon sanitaire of subordinate states bordering the Soviet Union – an ambition little different from that of his tsarist predecessors. Britain's foreign secretary Anthony Eden, who spent many frustrating hours at Yalta arguing with his Soviet counterpart Vyacheslav Molotov – nicknamed ‘Stone Arse’ for his ability to sit for hours refusing all compromise – thought

Stalin was “much more the heir of Peter the Great than of Lenin”.

Stalin knew that the position on the ground was in his favour. Roosevelt had twice postponed the conference, originally proposed for summer 1944, first to campaign for an unprecedented fourth presidential term and then again until after his inauguration in January 1945. During that period, Stalin's forces had occupied much of eastern Europe, and by late January Soviet troops had crossed the river Oder (then in German territory) and were within striking distance of Berlin. As a believer that “whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system”, Stalin intended to make full use of his armies' gains

He also planned to extract a high price for joining the war against Japan. This included the restoration of eastern territories and concessions surrendered by Russia after its humiliating defeat in the 1904–05 war with Japan. Some concessions would be at the expense of Nationalist China, whose leader, Chiang Kai-shek, a major American ally, had – like the Free French leader General Charles de Gaulle – not been invited to Yalta. Stalin's other priorities included extracting massive reparations from Germany for the damage inflicted on the Soviet Union, and the speedy return of Soviet prisoners of war.

Soviet gains

From Stalin's perspective, the conference went well. Towards its end he exulted to his security chief, Lavrentiy Beria, that he had achieved his aims and yielded little that mattered. On eastern Europe, with Molotov's loyal assistance, he doggedly frustrated attempts by Roosevelt and Churchill to ensure

arrangements for a new, democratically elected Polish government. On the Pacific war, the secret protocol he agreed with Roosevelt, and to which Churchill subsequently acquiesced, gave him the territorial concessions he wanted. On prisoners of war, he won agreement from Roosevelt and Churchill – anxious about the treatment of their own liberated prisoners of war in Soviet hands – that Soviet prisoners would be returned swiftly to their homeland. As Stalin intended, these included Cossacks and others who had fought with the Nazis, who were handed over with their families to their deaths by reluctant British troops.

On the United Nations, Stalin was satisfied that the agreed voting arrangements would allow the Soviet Union, as a permanent member of the Security Council, to protect its interests by exercising a veto. He also won US and UK agreement to the admission to the General Assembly of two Soviet republics, Belorussia and Ukraine.

As Stalin's armoured train carried him back across the frozen landscape to Moscow, the issue on which he was perhaps least satisfied was reparations from Germany. When reminded by Roosevelt and especially Churchill of the consequences of bleeding Germany dry after the First World War, he lost his temper – a rare occurrence during the conference – querying whether his allies intended not to punish Germany. Though Stalin won agreement that the Soviet Union would receive the lion's share of any reparations, he had to accept that their level and nature would be resolved by an Allied commission that would convene later in Moscow.





Position of power

A Soviet armoured division advances along the river Oder into Germany in January 1945. By the time the leaders met in Yalta, the Red Army had occupied much of eastern Europe and was within striking distance of Berlin, giving Stalin a strong bargaining position at his meetings with Churchill and Roosevelt, and playing to his belief that “whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system”



“Churchill spoke of leading Europe’s people to ‘sunlit plains of peace’”

Of the three leaders at Yalta, Churchill most energetically promoted a ‘Big Three’ meeting. They had met only once before, in Tehran in late 1943, since when the military and political situation had changed dramatically. “We can settle everything, we three, if we come together,” exhorted Churchill. His expectations were high, and he spoke lyrically of the “broad sunlit plains of peace and happiness” to which the Allies could lead Europe’s stricken peoples.

Churchill hoped to agree a common position with Roosevelt before confronting Stalin at Yalta. However, though the president conceded that their military and political chiefs should consult in Malta, where the delegations gathered before flying on to Yalta, he himself avoided any substantive pre-conference discussion with Churchill. He planned to woo Stalin by avoiding any impression that the Americans and British were ganging up against him.

Roosevelt’s new coolness wounded Churchill. The prime minister’s daughter Sarah Oliver, who accompanied him to Yalta, recalled that “my father and all the British party felt a withdrawing of the former easy understanding” with the president. Churchill experienced Roosevelt’s detachment even more acutely when, only towards the end of the conference, Roosevelt told him about his accord with Stalin to secure Soviet entry into the war with Japan, and asked Churchill to sign it. He did so against foreign secretary Anthony Eden’s urging, arguing that he had no choice if he wanted to preserve Britain’s status.

Indeed, Churchill’s pre-eminent objective at Yalta was to protect not only

the UK’s position as a great power but also the British empire – a subject about which he was often more emotional than logical. Before the conference he wrote to his wife Clementine of his “resolve to go fighting on as long as possible and to make sure the Flag is not let down while I am at the wheel”.

Battling for democracy

Churchill found no support from Roosevelt, who taunted him about his imperialist views, suggesting – rightly – that they were anachronistic. Eden suspected Roosevelt’s motive, remarking that the president’s desire for decolonisation “was a principle with him, not the less cherished for its possible advantages... He hoped that former territories once free of their masters would become politically and economically dependant on the United States”. Stalin was amused by the sparring between Churchill and Roosevelt, who found it useful as a way of demonstrating that he and Churchill were not united. But Churchill would not be deflected, and secured assurances that any agreement about trusteeships for newly liberated colonies would not apply to British possessions such as Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore.

Churchill’s other key objective, for which he battled hard, was a democratic future for the countries of eastern Europe, especially Poland. Stalin was determined to retain the territories in eastern Poland occupied by the Soviet Union following the August 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. This required a new eastern border for Poland that, as Stalin reminded Churchill and Roosevelt, broadly followed the so-called ‘Curzon Line’ that had been proposed by Britain’s then foreign secretary Lord

Curzon after the First World War in a failed attempt to arbitrate in a conflict between the newly independent Poland and the Soviets. Stalin proposed that Poland be compensated with territory in the west at Germany’s expense, arguing that the new western border should be along the Oder and Western Neisse rivers. Churchill, like Roosevelt, acquiesced over the Curzon Line. In the west, where he worried about the effect of the resulting huge displacement of people, he accepted the principle but left details for further discussion.

Winning Stalin’s support for a new, fully democratic government for Poland proved even more difficult. Churchill spent hours arguing for a solution that would not be regarded as a betrayal by the Polish government in exile in London and the thousands of Poles fighting on the Allied side. He and Roosevelt finally accepted a compromise that they hoped would deliver a new government and fair elections. Churchill knew he was taking much on trust and that the key issue would be “informing ourselves properly about what is going on in Poland. All the reality in this business depends on this”.

Travelling home, Churchill had some grounds for optimism. The leaders had signed a Declaration on Liberated Europe that, if honoured, would guarantee democratic freedoms in newly liberated countries. But it was obvious to him that Britain was no longer the power it had been when the war began. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, Churchill had wryly described himself as “a poor little English donkey” in between “the great Russian bear” on one side and “the great American buffalo” on the other. At Yalta, the little donkey found himself even more overshadowed.





Uneasy understanding

Roosevelt and Churchill huddle together during the Yalta Conference. Churchill had energetically promoted the meeting, but was disappointed to discover that in Yalta the US president was intent on courting Stalin, at the expense of the previously close relationship between his country and the UK

“I didn’t say the result was good. I said it was the best I could do”

Roosevelt, most frail of the three leaders, had two main aims at Yalta: securing Soviet entry into the war against Japan and endorsement of his United Nations plans.

Roosevelt believed Soviet entry into the Pacific war essential to save millions of young American lives that might otherwise be lost in an invasion of the Japanese home islands – fears held despite the good progress then being made by the Manhattan atomic bomb project (which had not been disclosed to Stalin, though he was well aware of it through his spies). At a meeting with Stalin on the fifth day of the conference, Roosevelt readily agreed to most of Stalin’s requests, including the cession of the southern half of Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Islands, then in Japanese hands, together with warm-water ports and railway concessions in Manchuria – the latter at the unconsulted Chiang Kai-shek’s expense. In return, Stalin committed to enter the war against Japan within two or three months of Germany’s surrender.

The United Nations was Roosevelt’s brainchild, inspired by President Woodrow Wilson’s efforts at the 1919 Versailles Conference to establish the League of Nations (to which Congress subsequently vetoed US entry). Roosevelt believed such an organisation essential to world peace – as was American leadership of it, agreeing with Wilson that the United States was “the only nation that all feel is disinterested and all trust”. The name ‘The United Nations’ had emerged from talks between Roosevelt and Churchill over the winter of 1941–42. Following an international meeting at Dumbarton Oaks, a mansion in Georgetown, Washington DC, in

1944, a broad structure had begun to emerge, with a General Assembly and a Security Council.

However, Roosevelt knew that much remained to be clarified. On the journey to Yalta, his aides became frustrated that he seemed prepared to discuss only one issue: the United Nations. During the conference, he retained that focus – something Stalin realised and exploited to secure concessions elsewhere. By the conference’s end, Roosevelt had achieved most of what he wanted, including agreement on the draft UN constitution and a date for the first meeting of the organisation, in April 1945 in San Francisco.

Aftermath of the conference

In a buoyant address to Congress after the Yalta Conference, Roosevelt praised the outcome as spelling “the end of the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balances of power... that have been tried for centuries – and have always failed”. And in London, Churchill told colleagues that “Poor Neville Chamberlain believed he could trust Hitler. He was wrong. But I don’t think I’m wrong about [trusting] Stalin”.

Events soon contradicted both men’s statements. In Poland, a puppet government loyal to the Soviet Union began arresting opponents and showed no sign of upholding the agreement to hold free elections. Churchill wrote bleakly to Roosevelt that Poland was “the test case between us and the Russians of the meaning which is to be attached to such terms as Democracy, Sovereignty, Independence, Representative Government and free and unfettered elections”. He feared that on Poland they had “underwritten a fraudulent prospectus”.

Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945. That summer, at the final ‘Big Three’ conference in Potsdam, Harry Truman, Roosevelt’s successor, and Churchill – then Clement Attlee, who replaced him as prime minister during the conference – tried but failed to persuade Stalin to honour the Yalta agreements. Over the following months they watched helplessly as the Soviet Union tightened its grip on eastern Europe and, as Churchill described it in his speech in Fulton, Missouri in March 1946, “an iron curtain” descended. The “sunlit plains of peace and happiness” proved illusory; instead, millions in Europe were displaced by new borders and ethnic violence, and a cold war replaced a hot one.

Yalta also had long-lasting consequences in Asia. Roosevelt’s agreement with Stalin over Soviet entry into the Pacific War enabled Soviet troops to advance to Korea’s 38th parallel and to occupy Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Had that not happened, the Korean War might not have been fought, and Korea might today be united and democratic.

Churchill and Roosevelt are often blamed for not achieving more at Yalta. Yet the challenges they faced over eastern Europe have some analogies with the west’s current dilemma over Crimea – annexed by Russia – and eastern Ukraine. In both cases, western leaders have few viable sanctions to apply against Russia beyond moral pressure. Roosevelt’s private verdict on Yalta, shared by Churchill, was this: “I didn’t say the result was good. I said it was the best I could do”. 🌐

Diana Preston is the author of *Eight Days at Yalta: How Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin Shaped the Post-War World* (Picador, 2019)



United we stand

US president Harry S Truman addresses delegates at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco. On the last day of the conference, 26 June 1945, the UN Charter was signed – completing one of the primary goals of Truman's predecessor, Franklin D Roosevelt, at the Yalta Conference. Not all of Roosevelt's aims from Yalta were realised: a year later it was clear Stalin had no intention of loosening his grip on eastern Europe

HOW WOMEN

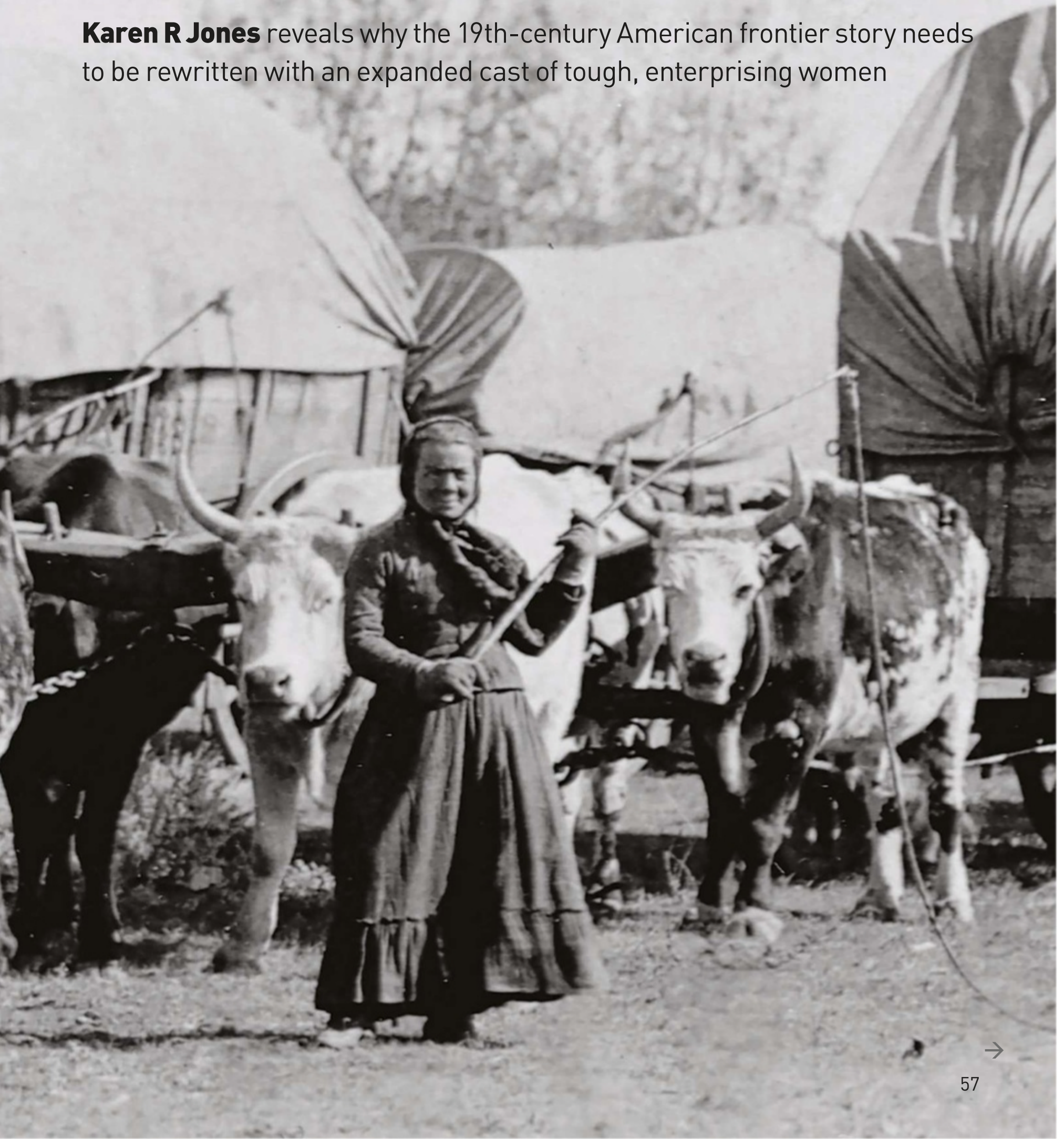
Wagons roll

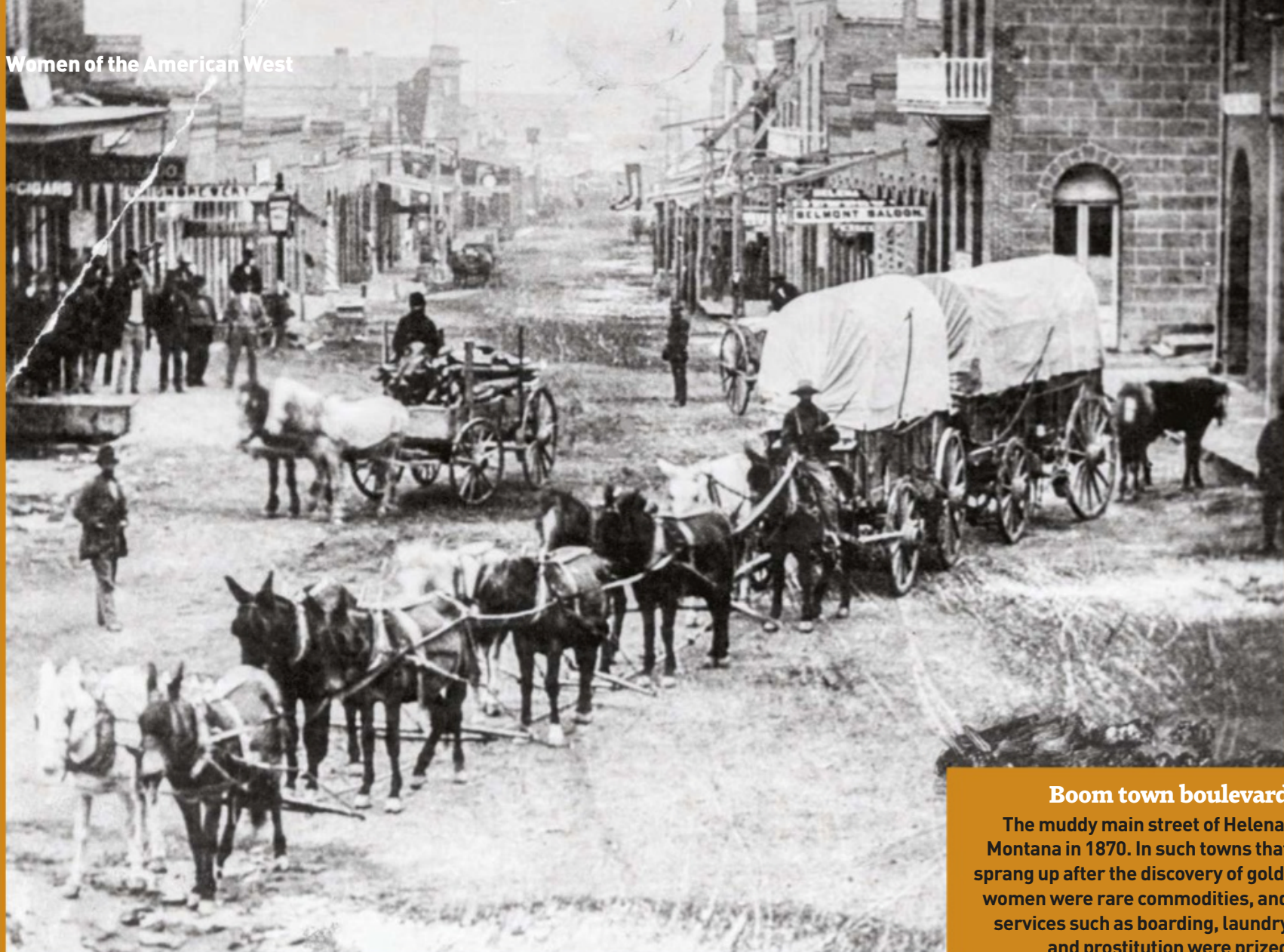
A woman drives oxen pulling a loaded wagon train through the Black Hills (in South Dakota or Wyoming) in 1887. Life for women in the American West was tough – but also offered a variety of novel freedoms and opportunities

GETTY IMAGES

WON THE WEST

Karen R Jones reveals why the 19th-century American frontier story needs to be rewritten with an expanded cast of tough, enterprising women





Boom town boulevard

The muddy main street of Helena, Montana in 1870. In such towns that sprang up after the discovery of gold, women were rare commodities, and services such as boarding, laundry and prostitution were prized

In 1854, a card sharp from the east of the United States, going by the name Dumont – possibly from New Orleans – arrived in the gold-mining town of Nevada, California. Having found success as a professional gambler in San Francisco, this entrepreneur of the American West opened a gambling parlour in this new location that, by all accounts, was highly profitable. But the settlement dwindled and Dumont moved on, spending time in Utah, Idaho and Arizona, testing the waters of brothel management in various spots during the 1860s. In 1872, in Nevada, Dumont was double-crossed by a partner, losing everything. So this inveterate gambler came to the table again, latterly in the gold-mining town of Bodie, California. In 1879, after a disastrous loss, the game was up. On 8 September, Dumont’s body was found outside town, having apparently taken a morphine overdose.

What makes this tale of frontier life unusual is that the protagonist was a woman: Eleanor Dumont, later known as ‘Madame Moustache’ and probably born Simone Jules around 1829.

The adage “Go west, young man”, reputedly popularised by *New York Tribune* founder Horace Greeley, conjures a vivid impression of the 19th-century American frontier as a place of masculine action and opportunity. As portrayed in cowboy movies – think John Wayne, Clint Eastwood – this world of tough-talking, gun-toting macho swagger has often been seen as the exclusive domain of men. But, as recent research (and Dumont’s

story) has shown, this was also a place of women’s agency, social latitudes and the stretching of established gender boundaries. As such, the history of ‘how the West was won’ (or lost) was much more variegated than the vision presented in traditional historical readings and countless Hollywood westerns.

As a place of new starts, economic possibility and social freedom, in the 19th-century the American West represented a realm very different from the east. Travellers on the overland trails in the middle of that century were faced with unfamiliar and challenging terrain. Vast expanses of prairie, the soaring peaks of the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada, and the forbidding deserts of the far west separated Independence, Missouri (from where many wagon trains departed) from the shores of the sparkling Pacific. Matching this exceptional topography was an equally monumental imagined landscape of manifest destiny, national dreams and personal aspirations in the making.

Expanding empire

Over the first half of the 19th century, the US claimed vast swathes of territory through the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the annexation of Texas (1845), the Oregon Treaty (1846), and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). When Jefferson assumed the presidency in 1801, the US counted 864,000 square miles of territory. By 1862, when the Pacific Railway Act was signed, paving the way for a true transcontinental railway line, and President Abraham Lincoln was grappling with thorny issues



Staking a claim The Chrisman sisters pictured by a sod house in Lieban Creek, Nebraska, in 1886. Many women travelled west to claim territory on the Great Plains; Lizzie Chrisman (second left) bought her land from the government around the time this picture was taken, paying \$2.50 per acre

Women stretched the limits of convention, changing their costume, habits and daily activities to fit the needs of the trail

around slavery and secession, that figure had mushroomed to close to three million square miles.

Involved in this dynamic story of territorial conquest and associated political, economic, social and environmental transformation were thousands of women – migrants from across the world, who made the West their home. In the traditional telling of the frontier story, female characters were either invisible or consigned to the role of supporting player and gender stereotype: sun-bonneted helpmates, school ma'ams or sassy saloon girls. A glance at the 'women's West', however, presents a much more complex story – one of resilience and adaptation, loosened social conventions, inventive directions in female empowerment and a 'hidden history' of gender unorthodoxy.

Although the decision to travel west was typically made by men, many women, too, greeted the possibilities of overland migration with excitement and interest. Some were fearful of the unknown, their fears fed by a contemporary literary digest rich in tales of damsels in distress taken captive by Native Americans, and of a savage landscape roamed by hungry wolves and angry bears. Others, though, relished the adventure and embraced the ethos of westering possibility.

On the road, women routinely stretched the limits of convention, either by necessity or inclination, changing their costume, habits and daily activities to fit the needs of the trail. For some, the casting off of etiquettes and the assumption of new roles and duties provoked fears about losing feminine identity in the uncivilised wilds. However, for others, abandoning long petticoats and gloves in favour of riding astride horses, driving wagon trains and shooting game was to be relished. One such woman was Sarah Raymond Herndon, who was 24 or 25 when she emigrated with her family to Virginia City, Montana, in 1865. In her 1902 memoir *Days on the Road: Crossing the Plains in 1865*, she wrote effusively of trailside foraging, fishing, riding out on her horse and dispensing with her long skirts.

For many migrants, the objective was land, and many women travelling within family units aimed to claim territory under the auspices of the Homestead Act (1862). Significantly, one in 10 homestead claims were filed by single women (including widowed and divorced women) who, under the rules of the federal



Beyond the pail

A woman milks a cow at a farmstead in the mountains of Colorado, c1900. Perhaps because of the many hardships they suffered in the West, the story of women pioneers is characterised by camaraderie, resilience and ingenuity

Frontier women endured challenging environments, social isolation and a seemingly never-ending litany of domestic chores

distribution, could receive title to 160 acres of land as heads of household as long as they were over 21, paid the registration fee, lived on the site and proved that they had ‘improved’ that land.

Diaries and journals written by homesteading women reveal their lot to be a hard one: they endured challenging environments, social isolation and a seemingly never-ending litany of domestic chores. One woman on the plains wrote in her diary of a pressing personal dilemma: whether to eat her last chicken for sustenance or preserve it as a companion. Their stories, though, were also full of female camaraderie, resilience and ingenuity – sharing home remedies for illnesses, building gardens to enliven sod houses, and taking command of households when faced with absent, dead or useless husbands.

In fledgling towns, meanwhile, women found themselves rare commodities: in early mining settlements, men outnumbered women nine to one. Sarah Herndon described the Virginia City mining camp as an energetic and sprawling community where men scrambled for claims like “bees around a hive” and left the ground with “great deep holes and high heaps of dirt”. Services such as boarding, laundry and prostitution were prized in these frenetic, rapidly developing settlements. Fortunes were there to be made and lost, not only by prospectors but also by female entrepreneurs – though such women were also vulnerable to abuse.

Steps towards suffrage

Women on the 19th-century frontier made steps towards political suffrage. The territory of Wyoming gave women the vote in 1869, the same year the National Woman Suffrage Association was founded (though this reflected not only the campaigning of early female suffragists but also a sentiment to cancel out the votes of African-American men with white women). The next eight states to grant suffrage to women were all in the West: Colorado (1893), Utah, Idaho (both 1896), Washington (1910), California (1911), Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona (all 1912). This indicates how the racial fissures of frontier geopolitics, the aptitudes of pioneer women and ideas about the ‘civilising’ female voice conspired to change suffrage laws.

Elsewhere, women redefined gender norms in all sorts of ways. Martha Jane Cannary – popularly known as Calamity



Riding high in a man's world

Self-styled scout, performer and frontierwoman Martha Jane Cannary, better known as Calamity Jane, pictured in 1901. Having migrated to Montana at a young age, Jane made her name in male-dominated occupations, and for wearing men's clothes



Ploughing a lonely furrow

A family farm in Custer County, Nebraska, c1885. Between 1862, when the Homestead Act was passed, and 1900, the government allocated cheap land to an estimated 400,000 families



A wolf in men's clothing

Canadian stagecoach robber Pearl Hart (c1871–c1955), wearing male attire. Some women in the West found that wearing men's clothes enabled them to pull off criminal heists



GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Fishing for chips

A woman collects bison 'chips' (dung) in Kansas, c1893. In the tree-sparse Great Plains, dung was an important fuel – and the job of collecting it often fell to women

Jane, depicted by Doris Day in a 1953 musical – became known for flouting female conventions. A child migrant to Montana in the mineral rushes of the 1860s, Canary made a name for herself working in male-dominated occupations (driving mules, travelling with the army) and, especially, for her habit of wearing men's clothes.

An enigmatic figure who emerged as a frontier celebrity playing in 'Wild West' shows at the end of the 19th century, Calamity Jane played on her reputation as a 'female scout' with aplomb, regaling journalists and saloon-goers with tales of how she might have saved General Custer, her routing of Native American outlaws of the Deadwood Stage, and her capture of 'Wild Bill' Hickok's killer with a meat cleaver. A raconteur and storyteller who played fast and loose with the truth for popular appeal, she ably advertised the West as a place of grand adventuring and tall tales.

Meanwhile, her lived experience, as an itinerant, butch woman on the margins of society, who was at home in the company and performance routines of men, speaks in important ways to modern understandings of fluid sexual and gender identity. Calamity Jane, though, attracted notoriety as much as acceptance: though she garnered attention for her personification of the 'wild and woolly' eccentricities of pioneer days and her lively invocation of western spirit, she was also lambasted by critics for her wayward and 'unfeminine' attributes.

Different ways of being

'Passing' as a man brought various opportunities – work, freedom of movement, safe travel – for independent women in an age of considerable gender restrictions. The West was particularly appealing as a place to experiment with different ways of being – politically, legally and socially permissive, with a mobile demographic and inhabited by plenty of people looking to start afresh.

Adopting a manly disguise facilitated the tracking down of errant lovers, escape from abusive relationships, or enacting of criminal heists



A pin celebrates the centenary of the birth of suffragist leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The agency of women in the West gave impetus to the early women's suffrage movement

Take One Eyed Charley (Charlotte Parkhurst). Orphaned in Vermont, she began dressing as a boy, sought her fortune in the California Gold Rush in 1849, voted in the presidential election of 1868, and became a well-known west-coast stagecoach driver. After "thirty years in disguise" (as reported in the *New York Times*), her sex was discovered only after her death in 1879.

The wearing of masculine costume, then, could be a pragmatic recourse: a way to find sustenance or work and claim the fruits of the frontier. Reflecting on the common practice of women passing as men to claim mining rights, the Colorado *Central City Weekly Register* went as far to assert that a "mania for females to appear in male attire has struck". The decision to

'pass' as a man was also deeply political in nature, and making one's way 'in a man's world' an important performance of gender liberation. As female rights campaigner Elizabeth Cady Stanton proselytised in an 1869 article in *The Revolution*: "If, by concealing our sex we find that we, too, can roam up and down the earth in safety, we shall keep our womanhood a profound secret" until such a day when "we shall dress as we please".

For some, adopting a manly disguise facilitated the tracking down of errant lovers, escape from abusive relationships, or the successful execution of criminal heists. The latter, on occasion, backfired – as in the case of Pearl Hart, 'the girl bandit', whose trademark disguise eventually abetted her capture. For others, meanwhile, the possibility of masculine masquerade allowed for the expression of a non-binary gender identity or the pursuit of romantic relationships with women. This important 'hidden history' of gender unorthodoxy is only now being excavated.

Long written out of the historical record, the voices of frontier women are vividly evoked by a richly textured corpus of diaries and period accounts, though the voices of non-white, non-literate and nonconformist figures are still poorly represented – for example, women with non-binary gender identities, or who enjoyed same-sex relationships. Of course, the experiences of indigenous women during this period are also absent from this narrative.

Horace Greeley had an up-close encounter with these variegated gender dynamics. Riding a stagecoach in 1859, he shared a carriage with a young prospector headed for the mineral fields, full of conversation and dreams of fortune. When the argonaut (the nickname for gold-rush hopefuls) left the train, the conductor pointed out to Greeley that the plucky young lad was, in fact, a woman. "Go west, young man" may have been a catchy invocation, but it overlooked a large chunk of the story. 🌐

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Yasuke (late 16th century)

AN AFRICAN SAMURAI IN JAPAN

In a land wracked with conflict, the arrival of an imposing black man caused uproar.

Thomas Lockley explores the Japanese sojourn of the first African samurai

The tragic and brutal slave trade is a well-known facet of African history. But many other stories of Africans outside that continent are known by few today: tales of royal dynasties in India; of knights, bishops, and teachers in Portugal; of interpreters in China; and of the first foreign-born samurai in 16th-century Japan.

This man known to history as Yasuke (possibly a Japanese corruption of Isaac) was most likely a member of the Jaang (Dinka) people, of what's now South Sudan, who had been trafficked to India as a boy. There he entered the service of the chief Jesuit in Asia, Alessandro Valignano, who was on an inspection tour of the Indies. Valignano's ultimate destination was Japan, home of the most successful mission in Asia, where he arrived in 1579 with his bodyguard and valet, Yasuke.

The first record of Yasuke in Japan describes a 1581 visit to Kyoto, then the country's capital. En route the Jesuit's party passed the port city of Sakai, where huge crowds clamoured for a glimpse of the African; buildings collapsed under the weight of spectators, and the Jesuit procession was severely disrupted. In order to escape, Yasuke had to ride a horse through the throng of enthralled locals.

He was not only the first African they had seen but was, by Japanese measures, a 'giant' – 188cm tall – good looking, intelligent and entertaining, with the strength of 10 men. And, because the Buddha was often portrayed with black skin, many saw him as a divine visitor.

That raucous reception was repeated in Kyoto, where thousands turned out to witness his arrival. He took refuge in the

Jesuit church but the mob broke down the doors, demanding to see him; some spectators were even crushed to death.

The most powerful warlord in Japan, Oda Nobunaga, was holding court in the Honno-ji temple nearby. He demanded to know who was disturbing his peace and, when he heard about Yasuke, ordered an immediate audience.

By that time Yasuke had learned quite a lot of Japanese, so was able to engage in conversation. The fascinated warlord had the African strip from the waist up, and scrubbed his skin to see if the dark hue was real. Finding it was, the delighted warlord threw a party for this astounding guest, and bestowed on Yasuke a large gift of cash, making him instantly rich.

A few days later, Nobunaga asked Valignano if he could take Yasuke into his service; Yasuke became Nobunaga's weapon bearer – a position of great honour – and confidant about overseas matters. Within months he received a stipend, a residence in Azuchi Castle, north-east of Kyoto, servants and a *katana* sword. The *katana* is the symbol of a samurai warrior, so it is traditionally understood in Japan that Yasuke was the first documented non-Japanese samurai.

Over the course of the next year, Yasuke accompanied Nobunaga in battle at least once. They were conquering the territories just north of Mount Fuji, long held by the Takeda clan, the Oda's mortal enemies. Yasuke was observed by a Japanese diarist just south of the holy mountain on the journey back to Azuchi.

In June 1582, Nobunaga launched a major campaign against his long-time enemies to the west, the Mori clan. A large army was already in the field, and

he set out for the front with around 30 men, Yasuke among them. In Kyoto they slept in Honno-ji, the temple where Yasuke had met Nobunaga 15 months earlier. In the hour before dawn on 21 June they were attacked by the 13,000-strong army of Akechi Mitsuhide, formerly one of Nobunaga's most trusted generals, who stormed the compound. Most of the defenders were dispatched with gunfire, the survivors finished off by hand.

During the fighting, the temple caught fire. As flames swept through the temple, Nobunaga performed *seppuku* (ritual suicide). According to legend, his last order was issued to Yasuke, telling the African to keep his head from falling into enemy hands. Yasuke fled to the new head of the clan, Nobunaga's son and heir, Oda Nobutada; however, he commanded only about 200 men, who were swiftly dispatched by the rebels, and he, too, was forced to take his own life. Yasuke was brought before Akechi, who ordered him to be returned to the Jesuits.

That is the last definitive historical mention of Yasuke. Records include sightings of similar men in Japan, but it is impossible to be sure whether or not they were Yasuke. There is evidence to suggest that he was remembered in Japan for another century before his story was forgotten. Today, the African samurai has been reborn as a character in computer games, anime, manga comics, films, books and theatre. 🌐

Thomas Lockley is associate professor at Nihon University College of Law, Tokyo, and co-author with Geoffrey Girard of *African Samurai* (2019, Hanover Square; published in the UK by Sphere as *Yasuke*)



An African samurai

The tall, strong African man who acquired the name Yasuke in Japan was at first an object of curiosity but soon became a prized samurai warrior serving a powerful warlord in the violent intrigues that wracked the country during that volatile era

ILLUSTRATION BY **LYNN HATZIUS**



REWRITING

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PAST





From Stalinist Russia to the Spanish Civil War, the 20th century offered George Orwell a huge array of material for his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. **Dorian Lynskey** charts the events that inspired a masterpiece



On 21 August 1936, a minor Bolshevik official named ES Holtzman told a Russian court that he had been involved in a Trotskyist plot against Stalin. Holtzman was a defendant in the first major show trial of the period known as the Great Purge, during which hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens were consigned to prisons, labour camps and execution chambers. Holtzman testified that in 1932 he had travelled to Copenhagen to rendezvous with Trotsky's son, Lev Sedov, at the Hotel Bristol. His evidence helped to convict himself and the other alleged plotters, all of whom were promptly shot.

A few days after the trial, however, a Danish newspaper pointed out the significant fact that the Hotel Bristol had been demolished in 1917. Evidence later emerged that Lev Sedov had been in Berlin on the day he was meant to have been in Copenhagen. Holtzmann's 'confession' could not have been true.

The point of the trial was to prove the existence of an international Trotskyist conspiracy as a pretext for purging the Communist Party of anybody who might possibly challenge Stalin's rule. The problem for Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, was that not a shred of incriminating correspondence existed, so all the 'evidence' had to come in the form of forced and scripted confessions of face-to-face meetings. The Hotel Bristol error laid bare the fraudulence of these damning testimonies. "What the devil did you need a hotel for?" an embarrassed Stalin berated the NKVD officers who had fabricated the confession. "You ought to have said that they met at the railway station. The railway station is always there!" When the official book of the trial was translated into English, the passage about the hotel was deleted.

One of the people who read about the Hotel Bristol fiasco was George Orwell, who was closely following Russia's descent into full-blown tyranny via the eyewitness accounts of disillusioned communists including Boris Souvarine and André Gide. Through their pamphlets, Orwell learned about many of the features of Stalinism that would feed into his great novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949): the cult of personality; the rewriting of history; the assault on freedom of speech and thought; the denunciations and forced confessions; and the paralysing climate of suspicion and fear.

In the novel, Winston Smith is a junior official in the Ministry of Truth, the Ingsoc regime's propaganda ministry, where he rewrites old newspaper reports to reconcile them with the latest party line. One day, Winston comes across a stray photograph that proves the notorious traitors Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford were in New York on the same day that they had confessed to meeting the Trotsky-like Emmanuel Goldstein in Eurasia. This may have been Orwell's tribute to the case of ES Holtzman.

Orwell called *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "a novel about the future" but it was also a deeply researched story about the recent past. While she was writing *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985),

Margaret Atwood set herself a rule: "I would not include anything that human beings had not already done in some other place or time." Similarly, Orwell drew many of the most disturbing elements of his fictional dictatorship of Oceania from totalitarian reality. Many readers in 1949 would have recognised that most of the events and practices in the novel echoed what had already unfolded in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. Winston Smith, the enigmatic dictator Big Brother and the fanatical interrogator O'Brien never existed, but people very similar to them did. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell insisted, was not a prophecy but a satirical exaggeration of recent history.

Orwell had endured a brief taste of the "nightmare atmosphere" of a police state in 1937, when he was fighting for the Republic against General Franco in the Spanish Civil War. The British author fought with the POUM, a small and vulnerable Marxist movement regarded with suspicion by the Soviet-backed Republican forces. When Barcelona fell into the hands of Stalinists, the POUM was accused of conspiring with both Trotsky and Franco. Orwell was forced to flee for his life; many of his comrades were not so fortunate. "However little you were actually conspiring, the atmosphere forced you to feel like a conspirator," he wrote in his war memoir *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).



This was Orwell's only first-hand experience of tyranny but he merged these vivid memories with information culled from myriad conversations, books, pamphlets and articles. If a first-person account of life in the Soviet Union or Germany was published in English or French between 1936 and 1948, then there is a strong chance that Orwell read it. Details of totalitarianism that are now commonplace in history books were leaking out sporadically, and Orwell was busy collecting them, years before he had the idea for a novel about such a regime. The paranoia, deceit and betrayal that he had encountered in Spain had left him with an urgent desire to learn as much as he possibly could about totalitarian methods.

One of these illuminating books was *Assignment in Utopia* (1937) by the American journalist Eugene Lyons, a former communist and Moscow correspondent who had become disgusted by Stalinism. Lyons was fascinated by a numerical slogan designed under Stalin to inspire workers to complete the Five-Year Plan, a list of economic goals, in just four years: "The formula $2+2=5$ instantly riveted my attention. It seemed to me at once bold and preposterous — the daring and the paradox and the tragic absurdity of the Soviet scene, its mystical simplicity, its defiance of logic, all reduced to nose-thumbing arithmetic." Orwell used the unreal equation in a book review a few months later and eventually made it a symbolic battlefield in the psychological war between Winston and O'Brien. In the

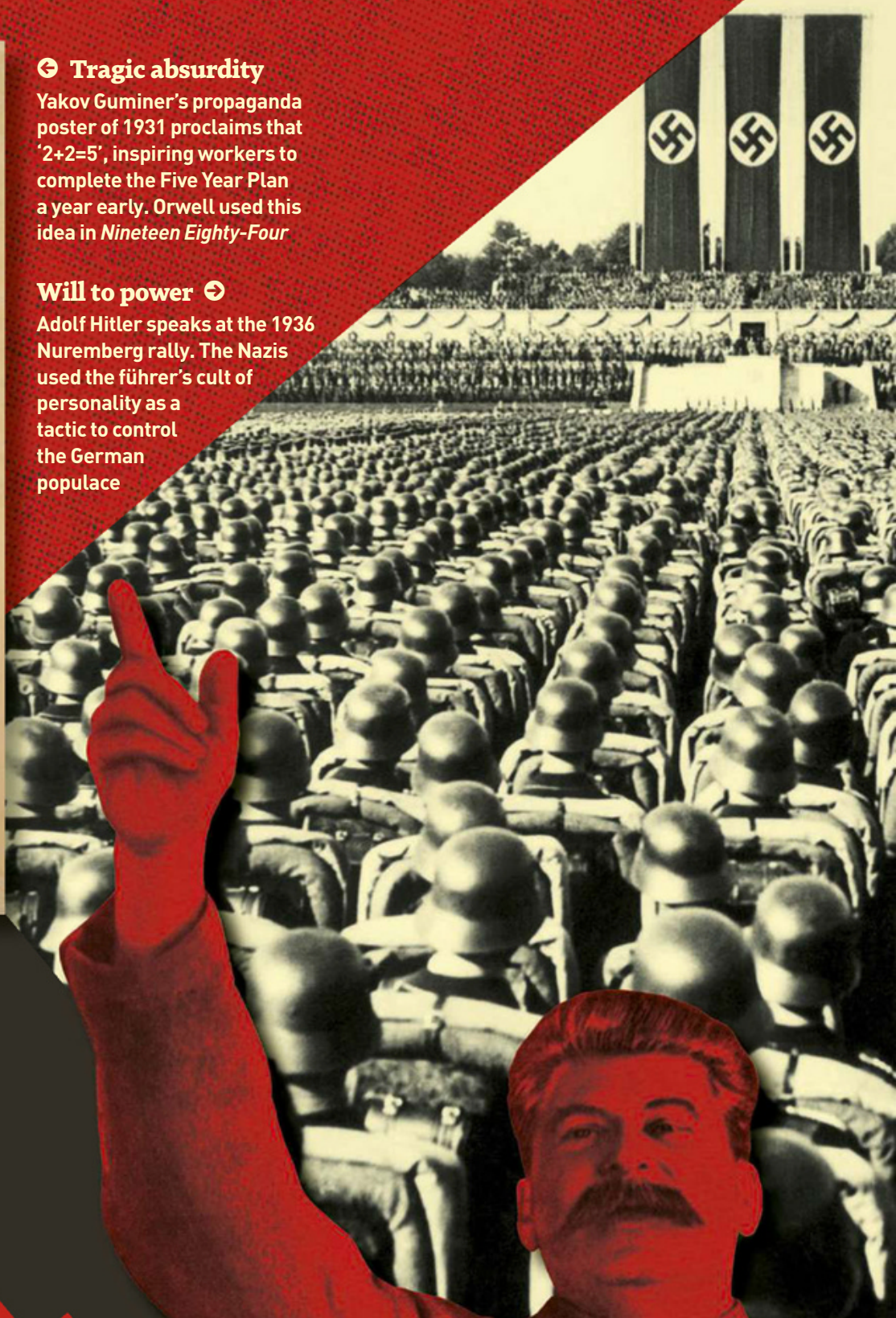


☹ Tragic absurdity

Yakov Gumerin's propaganda poster of 1931 proclaims that '2+2=5', inspiring workers to complete the Five Year Plan a year early. Orwell used this idea in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Will to power ☹

Adolf Hitler speaks at the 1936 Nuremberg rally. The Nazis used the führer's cult of personality as a tactic to control the German populace



THE PARANOIA,
DECEIT AND BETRAYAL
THAT ORWELL
ENCOUNTERED IN
THE SPANISH CIVIL
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WITH A DESIRE
TO LEARN
ABOUT TOTALITARIAN
METHODS

Man of steel

Soviet leader Josef Stalin. "His portrait is seen everywhere, his name is on everyone's lips, and praise of him occurs in every public speech," wrote André Gide. "Is all this the result of worship, love or fear? Who can say?"



George Orwell

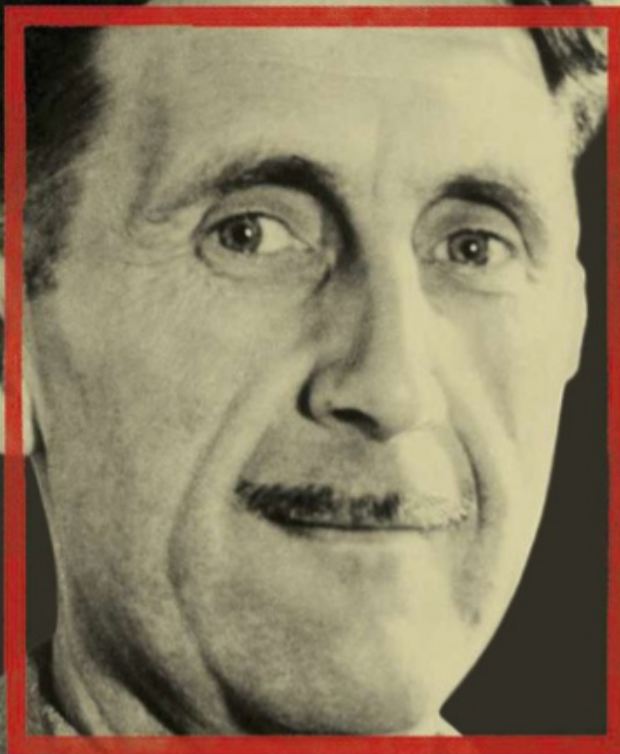
Eric Arthur Blair was born in Motihari, north-east India on 25 June 1903, and grew up in England. After graduating from Eton College, he spent five years in the Imperial Police in Burma (now Myanmar), which left him with a keen sense of political outrage and personal guilt. He drifted between journalism, tramping and menial jobs, which informed his first book *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), published under the pseudonym George Orwell. During the 1930s, he published four novels and two more works of non-fiction. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) examined working-class life in the north of England, while *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) described his experiences in the Spanish Civil War.

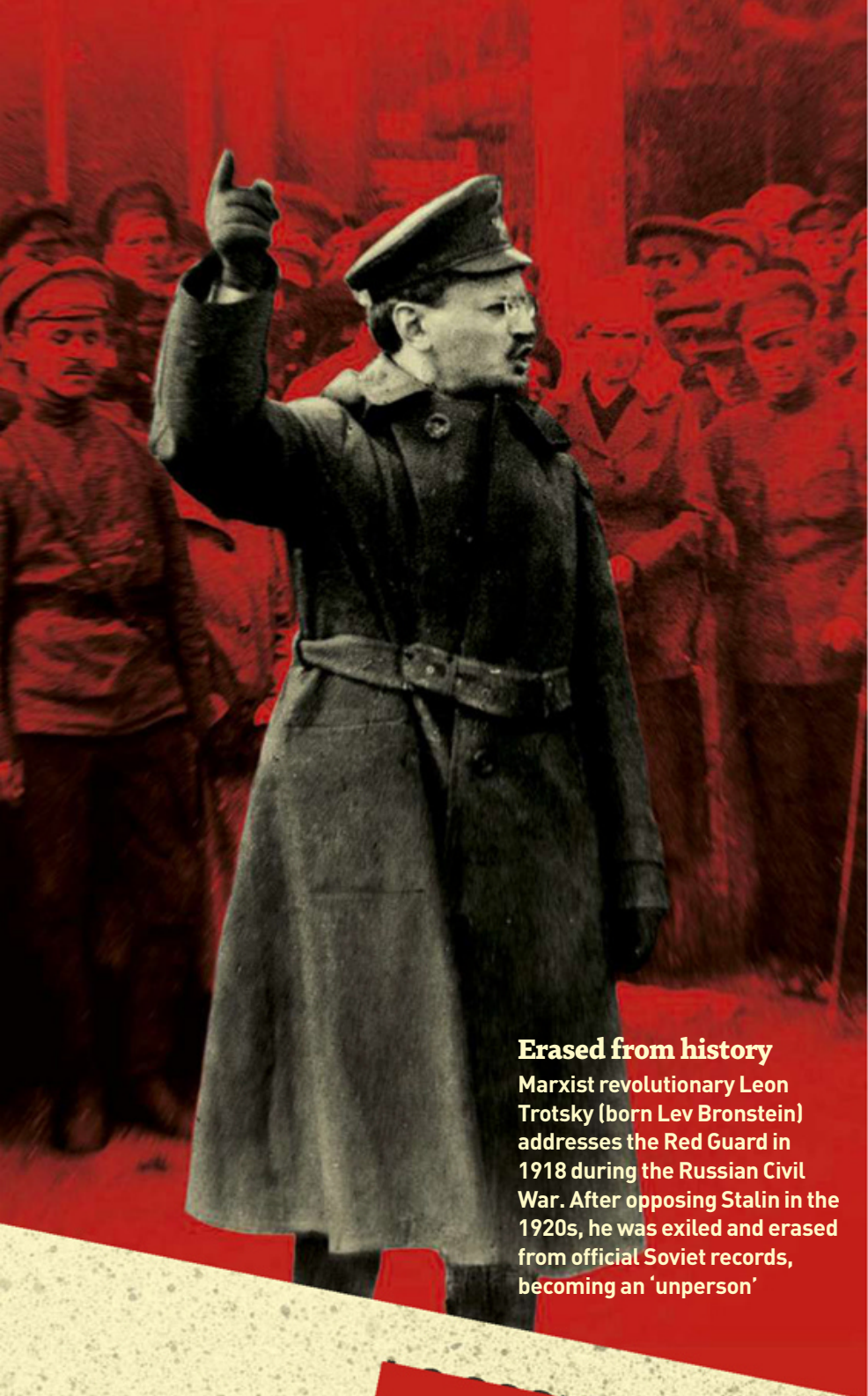
Classified unfit for military service in the Second World War, Orwell worked for the BBC's Indian Section for two years. Upon leaving the BBC in 1943, he joined the left-wing magazine *Tribune*, wrote *Animal Farm* (1945) and adopted a son, Richard Blair. In 1945, while Orwell was working as a war reporter in Europe, his wife Eileen died suddenly. The following year, Orwell moved to Jura in the Inner Hebrides, and began writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Delayed because of Orwell's journalism commitments and hospitalisation for tuberculosis, the book was published on 8 June 1949. This dystopian novel is set in a year (which may or may not be 1984) in what was then the future in Airstrip One (Britain), now part of Oceania, one of three warring superstates. The totalitarian ruling Party – whose leader, Big Brother, is the centre of a powerful personality cult, even though he may not exist – exerts total control over both actions and thoughts, constantly monitoring Oceania's people and rewriting history to match present political requirements.

Orwell married Sonia Brownell in October 1949 in hospital in London, where he died on 21 January 1950.

Future imperfect

Eric Blair, who wrote under the pen name George Orwell. His experiences in Burma fuelled his disdain for imperialism, but he also witnessed the pitfalls of socialist regimes





Erased from history

Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky (born Lev Bronstein) addresses the Red Guard in 1918 during the Russian Civil War. After opposing Stalin in the 1920s, he was exiled and erased from official Soviet records, becoming an 'unperson'

THE
STALINIST HABIT
OF REMOVING
THE NAMES
OF PURGED
COMMUNISTS
FROM HISTORY
BOOKS INSPIRED
ORWELL'S
IDEA OF
THE 'UNPERSON'

novel, $2+2=5$ is obscenely false, like saying black is white or up is down – but in Stalin's Russia it decorated billboards.

The Soviet experience furnished *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with many of its most striking features. The Stalinist habit of removing the names of purged communists from history books and airbrushing their faces from photographs inspired Oceania's category of 'unperson'. In creating Big Brother, all-seeing yet unseen, Orwell drew on accounts of Stalin's mystique, such as this passage from André Gide: "His portrait is seen everywhere, his name is on everyone's lips, and praise of him occurs in every public speech. Is all this the result of worship, love or fear? Who can say?"

Orwell's arch-heretic Goldstein is clearly based on Trotsky (whose real name was Lev Bronstein) but also resembles Andrés Nin, the POUM leader who was tortured and executed by the NKVD while the author was in Barcelona. The young Spies who denounce their parents to the Thought Police are modelled on the cult of Pavlik Morozov, the 13-year-old Soviet 'boy hero' who was allegedly murdered in 1932 for betraying his father to the secret police. (Historians now believe that the murder was itself a legend created by Soviet propagandists.) Less well-informed readers may not have realised that many of Orwell's futuristic atrocities had already happened, but observers of totalitarianism realised exactly what he was doing.



Orwell's greatest achievement in writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was, therefore, not invention but synthesis. He hit upon some of the novel's key ideas at least as early as 1937, and outlined it in his notebook (under the working title *The Last Man in Europe*) in late 1943, though he didn't type the final words until December 1948. The book was thus

the culmination of over a decade of reading, writing and thinking, which enabled him to gradually fuse multiple sources into a single scene or concept.

Take the Ministry of Love, the windowless torture complex in which O'Brien physically and psychologically dismantles Winston. Orwell only ever spent one night in a cell, after he contrived to have himself arrested for drunkenness in London in 1931 in order to experience incarceration for himself, but even that minor incident yielded an image used in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – a prisoner squatting over a broken toilet.

For more information he turned to accounts such as *The Woman Who Could Not Die* (1938), Iulia de Beausobre's memoir of two years in the Soviet prison system, and *Darkness at Noon* (1940), the first novel about the Great Purge, whose author Arthur Koestler had been incarcerated by Franco's forces in Spain. Orwell's scenes in the Ministry of Love are full of observations borrowed from Koestler's novel. Koestler himself integrated the memories of his friend Eva Striker, who had been



DURING THE 1940S,
ORWELL BELIEVED
THAT THE WORLD
WAS DROWNING
IN LIES

🕒 **Art of darkness**

Hungarian-British author Arthur Koestler, whose novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940) was mined by Orwell for images of Soviet incarceration

🕒 **Accused by allies**

A group of Marxist POUM militia in Barcelona, 1936; Orwell can be seen at the rear of the column. Many POUM members were killed after being accused by Stalinists of conspiring with Trotsky and Franco



imprisoned in Moscow on phony charges of plotting against Stalin. Winston's ordeal is thus a hybrid of the experiences of Orwell, Koestler, Striker and de Beausobre, and probably others, too. When citizens in the Soviet bloc read samizdat copies of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, they could not understand how a British author who had never set foot there could so accurately describe the society in which they lived. This is how: the careful amalgamation of years of research.

The irony of writing about the deployment of historical facts in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that the book describes a world in which historical facts have ceased to exist and the past is infinitely malleable. The Party's need to appear utterly consistent and infallible requires ceaseless lying on an industrial scale, to the point where citizens can no longer trust their own memories because they cannot be independently verified. To quote one of the book's most famous lines: "Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia." The result is a society in which nothing is definitively true – not even the date. As Winston acknowledges when he starts writing his clandestine diary, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may not even take place in 1984.

Orwell believed that the status of history itself had been radically challenged by totalitarianism. In his essay *Looking Back on the Spanish War*, written in 1942, he recalled telling Arthur Koestler that: "History stopped in 1936." By this he meant that the Spanish Civil War, as the first conflict of the totalitarian era, was the first time that rival propaganda machines made an accurate account of events impossible. "I know it is the fashion to say that most of recorded history is lies anyway," he wrote. "I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history could be truthfully written."



Traditionally, historians disagreed about many things, but there were at least some basic, uncontroversial facts on which they could concur. Totalitarianism, however, sought to obliterate that neutral territory and make absolutely everything arguable. "The implied objective of this line of thought," Orwell wrote, "is a nightmare world in which the

Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but the past. If the Leader says of such and such an event, 'It never happened' – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five – well, two and two are five."

By anticipating some of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s crucial phrases and concepts, *Looking Back on the Spanish War* makes it clear that the moral impetus for the novel came from the sensation, first experienced in Spain, that "the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world". The 1930s saw a cultural

obsession with data boom alongside the ability to convincingly doctor documents, statistics and photographs. In *The Thirties* (1940), a brisk and scathing history of the decade, which was approvingly reviewed by Orwell, the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge wrote: "Never before, it may be assumed, have statistics been so greatly in demand, never before so extravagantly falsified."

One of Winston's tasks in the Ministry of Truth is to erase all trace of the Inner Party member Comrade Withers, now an unperson, and replace him in the text of one of Big Brother's speeches with the entirely fabricated war hero Comrade Ogilvy: "Comrade Ogilvy, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar." Even lowly Winston, in his own small way, has been granted the power to control the past and, therefore, the future.



During the 1940s, Orwell believed that the world was drowning in lies. One way in which he kept his head above water was to write a novel that dramatised the ultimate consequences of totalitarianism's war on objective truth. Another was to hold himself to the highest standards. If he realised that he had made a factual error in print, then he

was quick to admit it. One small incident epitomises Orwell's extraordinary dedication to getting the facts straight, even when he had no incentive to do so.

In March 1945, *Animal Farm* was finished and edited, and Orwell was in Paris, working as a war correspondent. While he was there, he met Józef Czapski, a survivor of the Soviet massacre of tens of thousands of Polish soldiers in the Katyn forest in 1940. Czapski told him that Stalin's courage and leadership had been fundamental to repelling the German invasion of Russia; indeed, the Soviet leader had remained in Moscow even when he was being urged to flee for his own safety. In *Animal Farm*, however, Orwell had made the pig Napoleon, who represented Stalin, abandon his post during the Battle of the Windmill. He promptly wrote to his publisher, asking for that sentence to be amended: "I just thought the alteration would be fair to JS."

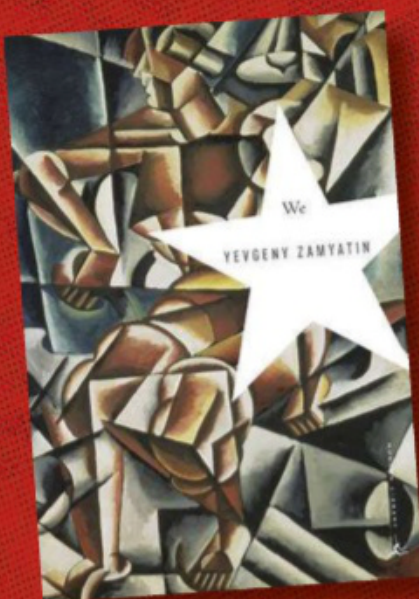
Neither Orwell nor Czapski had any reason to be fair to Stalin. Still, a fact was a fact, and even a fictional porcine version of Stalin deserved an accurate account. As a novelist, writing about talking animals or a tyranny of the future, Orwell displayed a scrupulous journalist's commitment to telling the truth. Abandon that, he thought, and there's no end to what you could lose. ●

Dorian Lynskey is a journalist and author.

His latest book is *The Ministry of Truth: A Biography of George Orwell's 1984* (Picador, 2019)

Dark mirrors

Orwell wasn't alone in taking inspiration from history for his writing. **Matt Elton** explores five more classic dystopian novels drawing on fact



We Yevgeny Zamyatin

Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin became involved in politics at an early age, joining the Bolsheviks in his twenties. Although he initially supported the revolutions that forged the Soviet Union, he grew increasingly critical of the Communist Party, particularly its use of censorship. That censorship made his literary career difficult and inspired his most famous work, *We* – finished in 1921 and first published in English in a 1924 New York edition.

Zamyatin's warning against totalitarianism is set 1,000 years after the

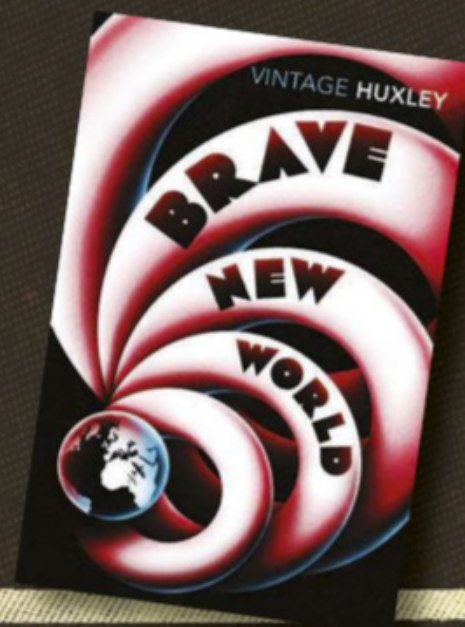
One State has conquered the world. His protagonist is D-503, an engineer living in a society ruled by a dictator and built, panopticon-like, almost entirely of glass. Several of the concerns and concepts that would later appear in Orwell's 1949 novel are also present here, including the dehumanising power of politics and a lead character who learns to love the state after being psychologically tortured. Indeed, Orwell reviewed *We* in 1946, arguing that "it is astonishing that no English publisher has been enterprising enough to reissue it". It was first published in Zamyatin's home country as recently as 1988.

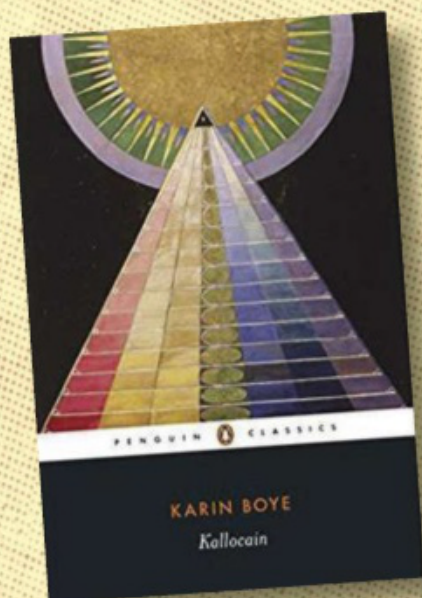
Brave New World Aldous Huxley

Orwell believed that fellow English author Aldous Huxley had derived inspiration for his 1932 novel *Brave New World* from *We*, a claim that Huxley denied. He instead argued that he aimed to parody the utopian works of authors such as HG Wells, countering their optimism with a nightmarish vision of the future.

Brave New World is laced with medical anxieties: citizens of Huxley's dystopia are engineered in artificial wombs and kept politically docile via a mix of mind-altering drugs and distractions such as the 'feelies', cinemas in which sensations of the films' characters are transmitted to the viewer. Within its fictional World State, the real-life US industrialist Henry Ford is revered for his focus on

mass production and homogeneity, and scientific ideas are useful only if they contribute to the continued stability of the government. The novel's protagonist challenges the status quo in this apparent utopia: predictably, it doesn't end happily.



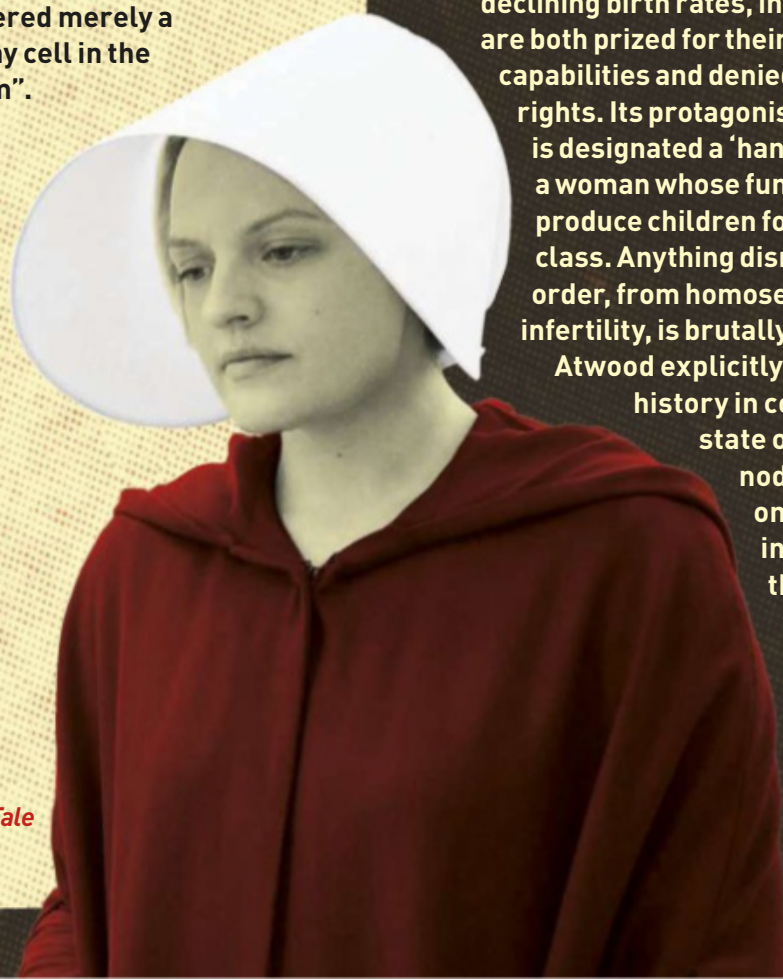


Kalloccain

Karin Boye

This 1940 Swedish novel was written midway between Huxley's and Orwell's works, and mixes the 'drug dystopia' of the former with the suppression of political rebellion that has become synonymous with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Boye's world state uses "police eyes and ears" to foster paranoia and crush the will of its citizens. As with many of the novels featured here, it depicts its totalitarian state through a first-person account created by one of its members: Leo Kall, the increasingly regretful inventor of the titular truth serum that reveals the recipients' innermost thoughts and feelings.

Inspired by Boye's time in Germany during the emergence of Nazism, the book explores fears that an individual could be rendered merely a "happy, healthy cell in the state organism".



Elisabeth Moss (right) stars as Offred in the US TV adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*

Fahrenheit 451

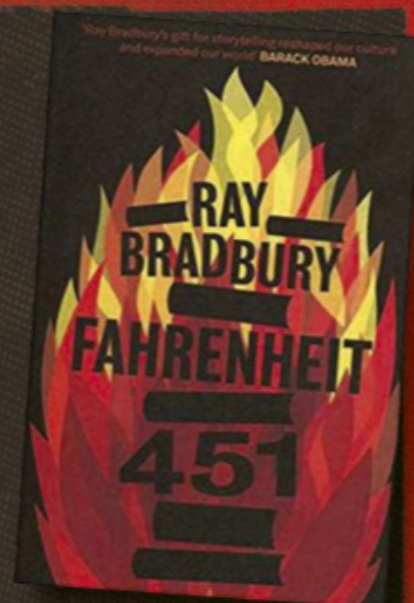
Ray Bradbury

While Karin Boye drew on the rise of the Nazis for her novel, Ray Bradbury focused in one specific element for his 1953 work: the burning of 'subversive' books in 1930s Germany. That – along with similar acts in Stalinist Russia, and US senator Joseph McCarthy's 1953 list of works by 'pro-Communist' authors – inspired *Fahrenheit 451*, its title an allusion to the temperature at which paper burns.

Featuring a society on the brink of war and 'firemen' charged with destroying banned material, the parallels are striking. Bradbury later argued that he aimed to highlight not censorship but the sidelining of literature by mass media consumption and the efforts of special-interest groups to control publishing – making individuals as culpable as the state.



Oskar Werner and Julie Christie in a 1966 film version of *Fahrenheit 451*



The Handmaid's Tale

Margaret Atwood

Atwood's 1985 novel is set in the North American state of Gilead, ruled by a theocratic dictatorship and facing declining birth rates, in which women are both prized for their reproductive capabilities and denied political rights. Its protagonist, 'Offred', is designated a 'handmaid' – a woman whose function is to produce children for the ruling class. Anything disrupting this order, from homosexuality to infertility, is brutally policed.

Atwood explicitly drew on history in conceiving the state of Gilead, with nods to the ban on birth control in Romania in the 1960s and the treatment of African people in the Atlantic slave trade



– the character Offred is renamed to reflect her status as a possession of her master.

Reproductive rights are still a contentious issue in the US today – and perhaps that's one of the reasons the book remains popular. Atwood's follow-up novel, *The Testaments*, was published in early September; a TV series based on the original novel is in its third season. 🌐

Culture

Books, exhibitions, films and more

The Conver- sation

“A consistent element of Britain’s image has been the lonely fighter standing against foreign tyranny”

Neil MacGregor talks to **Matt Elton** about the new season of his BBC Radio 4 series *As Others See Us*, which – on the eve of Brexit – explores how countries around the world view Britain and its history

A full-page photograph of Neil MacGregor, an older man with grey hair, wearing a blue sweater over a white collared shirt. He is standing on a rooftop or balcony with his hands in his pockets, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a hazy view of the London skyline, including the Shard and other skyscrapers.

Neil MacGregor photographed in London. "It seemed a good juncture, as Britain sets to leave the EU and operate alone on the world stage, to get a sense of how other countries view us," he says

“So much British political rhetoric is about Britain at war, and particularly the Second World War”

Matt Elton: For people who missed the first season of *As Others See Us*, can you explain what the series sets out to do, and what it covers this time around?

Neil MacGregor: It seemed a good juncture, as Britain sets to leave the European Union – following the Brexit referendum of 2016 – and operate alone on the world stage, to get a sense of how other nations view us. Britain is going to have to renegotiate its position with a whole range of countries around the world and, as we undertake those negotiations for future relationships, it’s going to be important to understand a little better what they think about us.

The first season covered Germany, Egypt, Nigeria, Canada and India. How did you choose which countries to explore in the five episodes this year?

We wanted as broad a global range as possible, and to focus on five countries that have been identified as key partners in Britain’s future after Brexit.

So, obviously, we needed to address the United States. But it’s so enormous that we decided we would take a different approach, focusing on Los Angeles and Boston – two cities with very different relations to Britain. Boston was, of course, the old colonial city that rebelled against Britain in the 18th century, but it was also transformed by the Irish famine of the 19th century [the city was a major destination for Irish emigrants]. So it’s a place with historical links to Britain in two separate ways.

Los Angeles, meanwhile, has never been part of British North America – but, as home to Hollywood, it’s a place that has altered how the world thinks about Britain.

We also wanted to look at Australia, because that country has been talked about by British politicians as one that is ready to be an early trade partner in a post-Brexit world. And, of course,

it is also a country with very long historical and imperial connections, and in which a large population has direct links with Britain.

Similarly, we chose Singapore because of Britain’s imperial role, but also because British politicians have talked in recent years about Singapore as a model for the UK in the future. We wanted to find out more about what Singapore [which gained independence from Britain as part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963] thinks of Britain now, and whether its people think that, after Brexit, Britain could become Singapore writ large.

Finally, we wanted to choose the two nations inside the European Union with the greatest connections in terms of population. Spain has more British people living in it than any other European country – around 300,000 – while, conversely, there are well over half a million people from Poland living in Britain.

To get to the heart of the matter, then: is Britain’s history and its historical relationship with these countries a key factor in shaping how they now see us?

It is – in *every* case. What is always striking is that, without exception, these countries seem to know a lot more about us

and our history than we do about them and theirs. Our view tends to be much more insular, and restricted to knowing only about the history of Great Britain and Ireland. But, strikingly, different parts of history are important for different nations depending on their preoccupations, their concerns, and the specific historical relationship that they had with Britain.

What major areas of history are important in the five nations you visit?

Perhaps inevitably, for three of the countries we explore in this season – Australia, Poland and Singapore – the Second World War plays a very important part in the way in which

The Spanish Armada, depicted in a 16th-century engraving. England’s stand against Spain has become a cornerstone of its self-image



Indigenous Australians dance to music in this 20th-century bark painting. The treatment of these peoples by European settlers remains a sensitive political issue in Australia today



they think about Britain. But what also emerges is that people from all around the world are very surprised by the extent to which British politicians in recent years have defined Britain in terms of its behaviour in historical wars. They are struck by the fact that Britain talks much more about its past in war than its past as a parliamentary democracy.

This also applies specifically to the way in which Britain addresses its relationship with Europe and the rest of the world: it often uses language of confrontation and struggle. So much British political rhetoric is about Britain at war, and particularly the Second World War. There's a huge discrepancy in how Britain sees itself in that conflict and how others see us.

Is it fair to say that Britain defines its identity in terms of war more than other countries?

I think so – and not just the Second World War. In Spain, for instance, they're very struck by the fact that Britain still defines its relationships so much in terms of the supposed little, heroic England that fought alone against mighty Spain in the intermittent conflicts [sparked by political and religious tensions] of the 16th century. And, for them, that has distorted the way the British think about Spanish politics to this day.

Both of those aspects are concerning to them: the focus on war, and the idea of Britain being alone. They don't see that as historically true, either.

Do you think that Britain is singularly obsessed with such myths in a way that other nations aren't?

As I say, Britain's rhetoric about itself and its place in the world is largely about conflict, and the most recent conflict in which it played a major part is the Second World War. Because of that, the reading of that war plays a much bigger part in British self-understanding than in any other country – with, perhaps, the exception of Russia.

Poland, obviously, is also completely shaped by the memories of the Second World War, so we're not unique in the fact that it's a foundation myth. But I think our own reading of the Second World War is often regarded as being dangerously selective.

Did the people you spoke to have a sense of why Britain focuses on these aspects of its history to such an extent?

The general view is that, since that struggle with Spain in the 16th century, the British have wanted to see themselves as the small force on the edge, fighting against one predominant, tyrannical power. Whether that power is Spain, or the France of Louis XIV, or Germany, or Russia, a consistent element of Britain's self-image has been the lonely fighter standing against foreign tyranny. And, for the people we spoke to in making the series, it was very hard to see the present-day EU as fitting credibly into this narrative of an oppressive, dominant power.

The British empire was also a key historical factor shaping Britain's relationship with the world. How was that viewed?

Australia and Singapore have direct historical connections to the empire, and they couldn't be more different. Descendants of European settlers in Australia have a complex view of it. They're clear that they were beneficiaries of the imperial system – which, for instance, is why the Australian government so willingly supported and sent troops to fight in the First World War. But they're also aware of the fact their forebears often did some terrible things to the nation's Indigenous population: dispossession, destruction and deliberate killing.

That, clearly, is a very big political issue. One of the great surprises in making this series was to hear the view of a distinguished Indigenous historian, Marcia Langton, who suggests that Indigenous Australians view the crown as having in some measure defended them against the settlers. In

“In Spain, Britain’s constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy were seen as the best guarantee of stability”

particular, Langton is very eloquent on the role of the present queen in acknowledging the significance and the dignity of the Australia’s Indigenous population as citizens of her realm.

What is the view of the British empire in Singapore?

It’s a very different story. While people in nations around the world have been removing emblems and statues of imperial rulers, in Singapore they actually have two versions of a statue of Stamford Raffles, who founded the British colony in 1819. This tells you something very remarkable.

This year, to mark the bicentenary of its founding, four new statues depicting other people who helped make Singapore – Chinese, Indian and Malay – were erected alongside the newer Raffles figure. This is a statement in sculpture that Britain’s contribution was free trade and the rule of law for everyone of all races. They’re clear that this was an enormous gift, and imperial history is, on balance, seen as a very positive part of Singapore’s present prosperity.

But – and this is very important – what’s clear about the Second World War narrative for both Australia and Singapore

is that the turning point was the fall of Singapore in February 1942. That changed everything. Britain had loudly promised that Singapore would be defended until the end, and that it would be protected along with Australia. The failure of the British to be able to keep their military promises is, really, the central lesson that both nations took from the war.

It changed their view of Britain forever, and they took two things from it: that Britain on its own was not able to shape its own future or the world around it, and that Britain on its own – without its allies, the Soviet Union and the US – could not keep its promises. It’s a very different view of the Second World War from the one most people in Britain grow up with and were taught about in school.

That’s an interesting point. How is British history presented in the education systems of these countries?

The situation in Spain is particularly interesting in this context. First of all, they’re very clear that it wasn’t the English who defeated the Armada, but the weather! But they also really do believe in the persistence of what’s called the ‘Black Legend’ [a sustained distortion of a nation’s history by those outside it]. In their case, it was the Elizabethan propaganda of the 16th century about the inquisition of Spain – stories lauding the heroic, buccaneering English, perpetuated in the 19th century by the poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. They believe that these works have coloured everything since – which has a certain amount of truth in it.

The other element of Spanish history that’s fascinating is that, as it emerged from the Franco dictatorship in 1975, the examples of Britain’s constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy were seen as perhaps the best guarantee of stability. The Spanish are, therefore, very distressed by what are often seen as the current crises of British democratic procedure and breakdown of parliamentary traditions.

Spain, of course, has its own experience with referendums, having had its own independence referendum (since declared illegal by Spain’s constitutional court) in the autonomous community of Catalonia in 2017. So it is very concerned about how to combine parliamentary democracy with a referendum.



A statue of Stamford Raffles, the British statesman who founded Singapore in 1819. “Imperial history is, on balance, seen as a very positive part of Singapore’s present prosperity,” says MacGregor



A Second World War propaganda poster from Poland. “For Polish people, their history with Britain is essentially the history of the Second World War, and of promises not kept. It’s a story of abandonment,” MacGregor argues

The feeling there is that referendums require very careful thinking and planning. So, rather fascinatingly, the Spanish regard the Britain of 2019 as a political model that they hugely admired but which has got itself into a serious predicament.

They’re not talking only about the EU referendum – they’re also talking about the Scottish independence referendum [held in 2014, and which resulted in Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom, although calls have persisted for a follow-up if Britain leaves the EU]. Their concern is that a referendum entrenches division within a country in a way that a general election doesn’t, which is why it’s dangerous.

What is the view in Poland?

We spoke to Radosław Sikorski, a former foreign minister of Poland, who said that British people are taught that they went to war in 1939 for Poland [the Nazi invasion of which, in September of that year, sparked the Second World War]. His view is that this just isn’t the case – instead, Britain declared war and then did nothing as Poland was dismembered. So, for Polish people, their history with Britain is essentially the history of the Second World War, and of a series of promises not kept. For example, Britain was too weak to help 1944’s Warsaw Uprising, in which the Poles rose against the Germans as Soviet armies drew near. It’s a story of abandonment.

Their argument is very clear: they saw in 1939, and again in 1944, that Britain on its own cannot do what it wants to do. It’s never really been able to control events and has, instead, always worked with allies. Yet it talks about its own history without properly referring to the part those allies played in it.

Did the people you spoke to in Poland worry about what the future might hold?

The big worry now in Poland now is about the future of the European Union. They still have a memory of what they see as Britain’s betrayal of Poland to the Soviet Union at the 1945 Yalta Conference [at which world leaders met to discuss the reorganisation of Europe once the Second World War had

ended; see our Perspectives feature starting on page 48]. They felt that the EU was the great hope to protect them against Russia, and to give them a level of security that they hadn’t previously had. Their huge worry is that Britain leaving will weaken the EU and expose them again to the danger of domination by Russia.

What other concerns do people in these countries share?

It’s worth remarking, I think, that at no point in any of the conversations I had in the course of making this series did the economic aspects of Brexit feature as a question or a concern. People focused instead on the political contribution that Britain has made and could continue to make, and what the Brexit decision is doing to the British constitution. What is it doing to Britain’s reputation for stability, for pragmatism, for being able to resolve things in parliament? What is it doing to the notion of a parliamentary democracy? Those are the key issues that were raised in all of the countries that I visited.

Many of the people we spoke to have a deep understanding of the rules of British parliamentary democracy, and appear to have a much deeper grasp of those areas than many of our own politicians and commentators. As a result of the confusion of a referendum and parliamentary democracy, there’s confusion about where power now lies. Is it with the people, via referendums, or with MPs in parliament?

That issue is seen as being extremely concerning in what was, for centuries, the model parliamentary democracy. The people that I spoke to regarded those principles and practices as being at risk – and, because they feel that Britain has, for centuries, been such a model, there is a real worry that this will have deep significance for the whole world. 🌐

Neil MacGregor is a

historian and former British Museum director. His books include *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples*, set to be reissued in paperback by Penguin in October

DISCOVER MORE

Listen to **As Others See Us** online at bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0001t91



Agenda

EXHIBITIONS, TV,
FILMS AND
MORE



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

D. L.

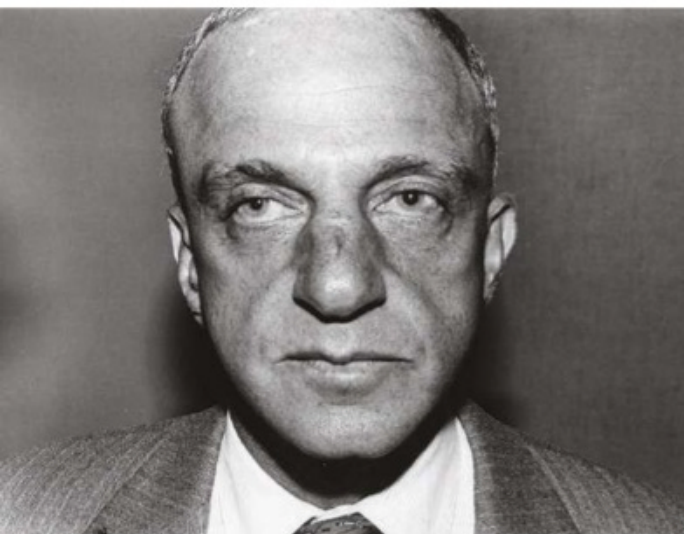


THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

This print of two women being menaced by Death and the Devil – quite the double-act – was made from a 1520s etching by German artist Daniel Hopfer. He is thought to have pioneered the use of etching as a technique in printmaking as early as 1500 – a development that expanded the range of artists using the medium. A new exhibition at New York's Met Museum explores this pivotal era through a collection of examples from the Renaissance world, including works by renowned figures such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Parmigianino, as well as lesser-known names.

The Renaissance of Etching, from 23 October at The Met Fifth Avenue, New York City
[metmuseum.org/exhibitions](https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions)





SHOCK AND LAW

Testament to the power of an individual to shape national politics, upcoming film *Where's My Roy Cohn?* charts the extraordinary life of the titular US lawyer. Born in 1927, Cohn (pictured above, in 1977) rose to prominence as chief counsel to Joseph McCarthy during that senator's investigation into suspected communist sympathisers in the 1950s. He subsequently represented such luminaries as Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, before being disbarred for unethical conduct in 1986. Some of the narrative surrounding the film may be a little overwrought – “you knew you were in the presence of evil”, thunders its official website – but Cohn was undoubtedly a powerful and controversial figure.

Where's My Roy Cohn?, from 20 September (US), other release dates vary
altimeterfilms.com/wheres-my-roy-cohn



Helen Mirren stars as Catherine the Great in a new HBO series

TSAR ATTRACTION

She's played Elizabeth I, Elizabeth II and, in *The Madness of King George*, that monarch's long-suffering wife Charlotte. Now actor Helen Mirren is portraying a Russian ruler: 18th-century empress Catherine the Great (reigned 1762–96).

HBO's new four-part miniseries, telling the story of Russia's longest-serving female leader, airs this autumn. Given the history on which it's based, it shouldn't be short of incident: Catherine came to power by deposing her husband, Tsar Peter III, and expanded and strengthened her nation to become one of the greatest powers in the world. The series will focus on the intrigue of the final years of her long reign, as well

as the extent to which they matched up to her youthful hopes and ambitions.

The team behind the camera is no strangers to royal drama, either. Directed by Philip Martin, of hit Netflix series *The Crown*, the script was penned by Nigel Williams, who also wrote the 2005 miniseries in which Mirren played England's Queen Elizabeth I.

You can read more about Catherine the Great in the October issue of *BBC History Magazine*, on sale now – see historyextra.com for more details.

Catherine the Great, from 3 October, Sky Atlantic (UK) / 21 October, HBO (US)
hbo.com/catherine-the-great

GETTY IMAGES/SKY UK LTD/ISLAMIC ARTS MUSEUM MALAYSIA.



This painted ceramic bottle, produced in France in the 19th century, was modelled on Persian designs

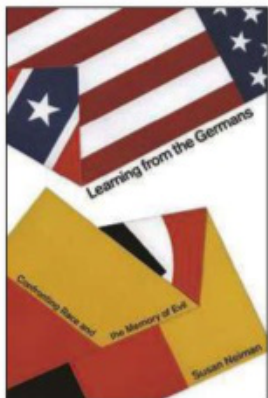
EASTERN PROMISE

For centuries, the Islamic world had a huge impact on the culture of the west: on images, decorative art, clothing and more. A new exhibition at the British Museum in London explores the major figures and works in this history, and delves into the 19th-century Orientalism movement, which evoked a mysterious (and frequently fantastical) version of Africa and the Middle East.

Inspired by the East: How the Islamic World Influenced Western Art, from 10 October at the British Museum, London
britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/east.aspx

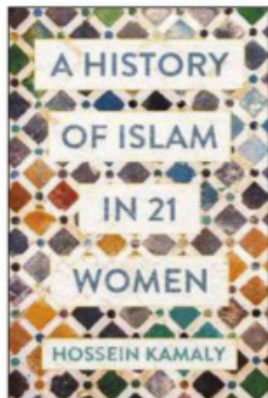
Nine books for autumn

The coming season reliably yields a bumper harvest of history books. These are some of the top titles to look out for in the next few months



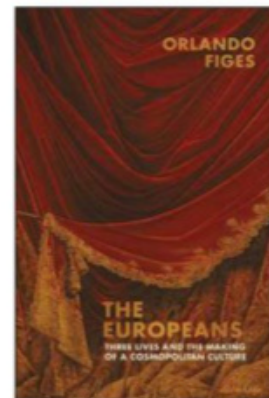
Learning from the Germans
by Susan Neiman
Allen Lane, August

Wrestling with the ways in which thorny legacies of the past – racism, fascism, colonialism – intrude upon the present, this is a philosophical and personal study of how to tackle historical responsibility and guilt. Ranging from Nazi Germany to the American South, it expertly walks the line between history and current affairs.



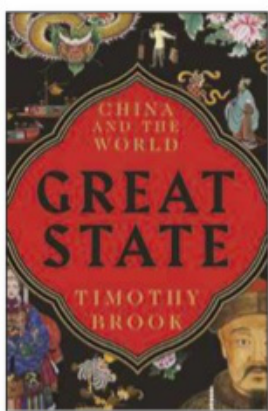
A History of Islam in 21 Women
by Hossein Kamaly
Oneworld, September

This collection of biographies offers an introduction to 21 key women in Islamic history. From the first follower of Muhammad to architects, teachers and politicians, Kamaly gathers a diverse cast: as the author notes, it's a selection that you'd be unlikely to see in a more traditional history of Islam.



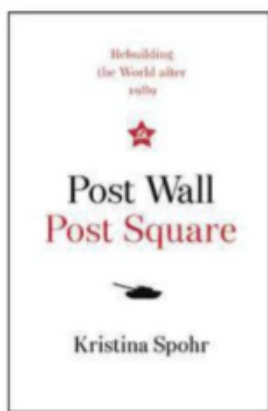
The Europeans
by Orlando Figes
Allen Lane, September

Singer Pauline Viardot, writer and critic Louis Viardot, novelist Ivan Turgenev: these three 19th-century figures may not be household names today, yet this new joint profile makes the case that they are key figures in a European artistic canon. Figes offers a vivid account of their lives, loves and the circles in which they moved.



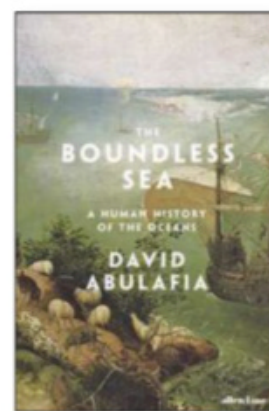
Great State: China and the World
by Timothy Brook
Profile, September

The author of the award-winning *Vermeer's Hat* (2007) charts the history of China's international relationships in an epic tale featuring emperors, traders, imperialists and invaders. It's a timely tome, in light of current western concerns about the Asian nation's continuing rise.



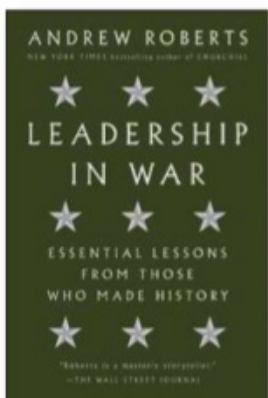
Post Wall, Post Square
by Kristina Spohr
William Collins, October

Thirty years ago, the Berlin Wall fell – and Europe changed forever. As well as focusing on the role of international leaders in shaping the new world order, Spohr also looks at popular pro-democracy uprisings – including in China, where they were brutally quashed.



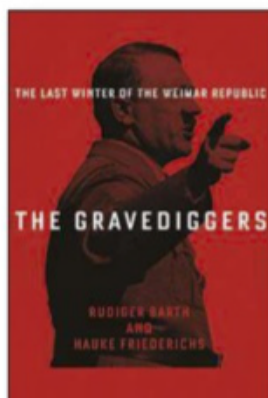
The Boundless Sea
by David Abulafia
Allen Lane, October

After traversing the Mediterranean in *The Great Sea* (2011), Abulafia now voyages through the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Aptly, given their vast geographical expanses, this is a major work (more than 1,000 pages) yet the author plots his course through the centuries with skill.



Leadership in War
by Andrew Roberts
Viking, October

What links Nelson, Stalin, Hitler and Thatcher? They all, Andrew Roberts argues, decisively determined the outcomes of wars fought when they were in power. By drawing parallels between these and five other leaders of the western world, Roberts sets out to define the traits and techniques that make a successful military leader.



The Gravediggers
by Hauke Friedrichs and Rüdiger Barth
Profile, November

Hindsight can be a dangerous thing: we now know only too well what lay in store for Germany after the winter of 1932. But was the rise of Nazism inevitable? And who were the figures vying for control? This day-by-day account of the last weeks of the Weimar Republic plunges into an era of rapid, terrifying change.



The Coolie's Great War
by Radhika Singha
C Hurst, December

The First World War wasn't won only by soldiers. This new book foregrounds the role of 'coolies', non-combatant members of the Indian army whose roles included porters and construction workers. Imperial attitudes meant that such contributors were viewed as inferior – a status they increasingly challenged.



Journeys

Stories and sights from global history

In the footsteps of...

Ibn Battuta's medieval journeys across Africa and Asia

Justin Marozzi traces three decades of travels by the unparalleled 14th-century wanderer across the *Dar al-Islam* – the vast Muslim world



Camels traverse the Sahara Desert in north Africa. In 1325, the young Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta set out east from Tangier through such desert landscapes – and didn't return home for a quarter of a century

On a piercingly clear day in June 1325, a 21-year-old Moroccan from Tangier fastened his sandals, checked he had everything he needed, and said his goodbyes to family and friends. He was setting out on Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca – a long and arduous journey from the north-west tip of Africa, but one that usually took months or a few years, not decades.

He departed alone, “having neither fellow-traveller in whose companionship I might find cheer, nor caravan whose party I might join, but swayed by an overmastering impulse within me, and a desire long cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries... I braced my resolution to quit all my dear ones... and forsook my home as birds forsake their nests. My parents being yet in the bonds of life, it weighed sorely upon me to part from them, and both they and I were afflicted with sorrow at this separation.” Little did any of them know that this relatively straightforward pilgrimage would somehow be extended into a 29-year, 75,000-mile odyssey across Africa, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the far east.

East to Egypt

Alone on his donkey, Ibn Battuta headed east across empty, sun-scoured valleys, over the Rif mountains and on through cedar and oak forests. In what's now western Algeria, he joined a caravan of travellers, which provided some companionship – though it did not prevent an acute pang of homesickness outside Tunis. “I felt so sad at heart on account of my loneliness that I could not restrain the tears that started in my eyes, and wept bitterly,” he wrote. And not

just homesickness: as on other occasions during his later travels, at Bougie in Algeria he fell ill from fever, though soon recovered enough to continue.

In Tunis he threw himself into his books, lodging in a *madrassa* (Islamic college) and hobnobbing with illustrious scholars and judges. It was the earliest display of his evident ambition, and a glimpse of the inveterate social climber he would become. Extraordinarily, on leaving Tunis in November 1325 amid a swelling caravan of travellers, he was appointed their *qadi* (judge) in recognition of his burgeoning intellectual talents.

Somewhat frustratingly, his later accounts rarely mention his experiences of life on the road; descriptions of landscapes and conditions are notable by their absence from his story. So we know little of the details of his journey across north Africa – but rather more about his impressions of cities, and of people he encountered.

Marriages came and went for Ibn Battuta like the desert winds. Two were contracted before he reached Cairo, the “mother of cities”, which mesmerised him as it does first-time visitors to this day. Packed with peerless monuments, the city “surges as the waves of the sea with her throngs of folk and can scarce contain them”. Like any tourist in Egypt, after admiring the city's mosques, colleges and an impressive hospital that offered medical services free at the point of delivery, Ibn Battuta took to the Nile (which “surpasses all rivers of the earth in sweetness of taste, breadth of channel and magnitude of utility”). There was something of the prude about the young traveller, who was appalled by what he saw in one bathhouse, where →



Ibn Battuta: Scholar, judge, explorer, travel writer

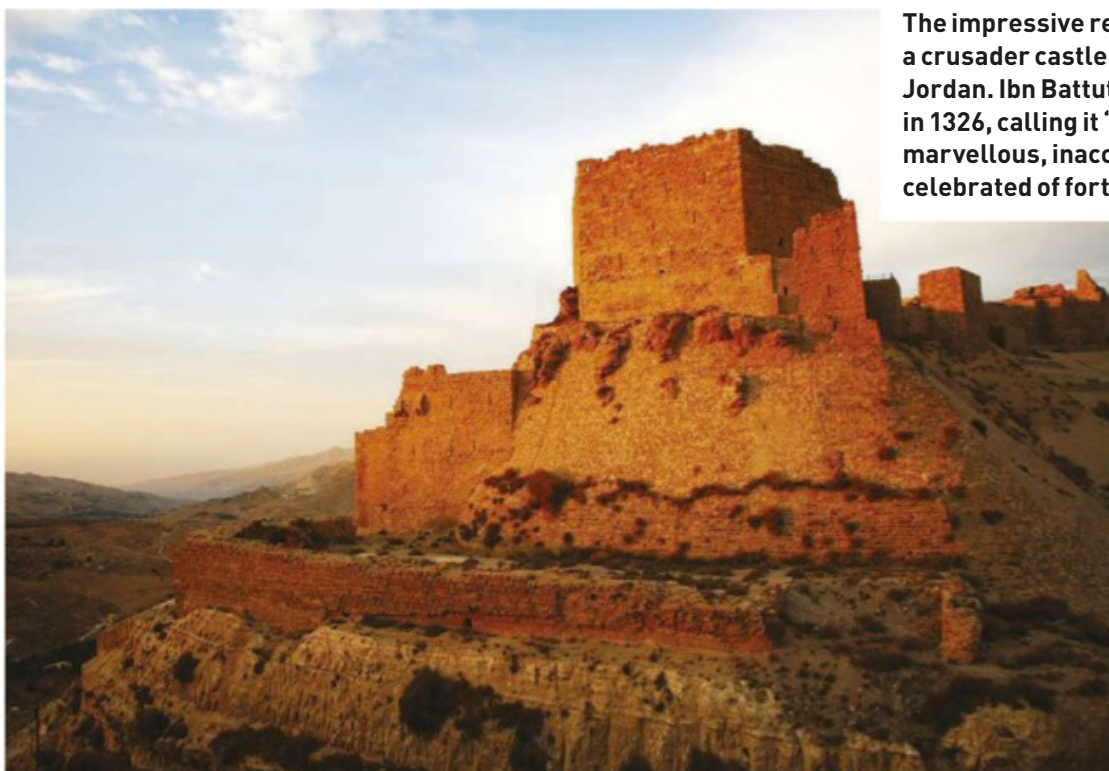
Revered today as the ‘Traveller of Islam’, Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Lawati al-Tanji ibn Battuta was born in the Moroccan port of Tangier in 1304. Of Berber stock, rather than an Arab, **his was a family of Islamic legal scholars**, an intellectual heritage that would underpin later stints as chief judge to foreign rulers. Few other details are known about his background, other than what featured in his memoir, and even there reliable information – such as the number of his wives and children – is scant.

We know, though, that his lifetime coincided with **the highpoint of splendour under the Moroccan Marinid dynasty**, which ruled swathes of North Africa between 1244 and 1465, making its imperial capital in Fez. This ancient city, where Ibn Battuta dictated his memoir to the young scribe Ibn Juzayy, was a seat of learning known as the ‘Athens of Africa’, hosting al-Qarawiyyin, a complex of mosque, madrassa, library and university dating back to the ninth century.

This rich cultural hinterland likely provided the foundations for Ibn Battuta's Muslim self-confidence and sense of superiority when encountering non-Islamic cultures, such as those in China and parts of Africa. As for his curiosity, wanderlust and insatiable desire for adventure, who knows where they came from? Perhaps he took at face value the **Prophet Muhammad's famous exhortation: “Travel in search of knowledge, even though the journey take you to China”.**

Ibn Battuta died in c1368–69, aged around 65. It's not known where or how he died, nor indeed much about his life after the writing of his memoir – which, 650 years later, remains one of the greatest works of travel literature ever written.

A relatively straightforward pilgrimage extended into a 29-year odyssey across Africa, the Middle East and the far east



The impressive remains of Karak, a crusader castle in what's now Jordan. Ibn Battuta visited Karak in 1326, calling it "one of the most marvellous, inaccessible and celebrated of fortresses"

Traditional feluccas (lateen-rigged sailboats) throng the Nile at Aswan. When Ibn Battuta journeyed along Egypt's great river, he may have travelled in a similar type of boat



Women browse a spice stall in the souks of Cairo's Khan al-Khalili bazaar district, originally built in the 14th century



The view across the medieval quarter known as Islamic Cairo is dominated by a forest of minarets – much as it would have been when Ibn Battuta was mesmerised by the "mother of cities"







Ibn Battuta was a proud Muslim travelling in an era when the blaze of Islam illuminated much of Africa and Asia

he found men “wearing no covering. This appeared a shocking thing to me, and I went to the governor and informed him of it.”

Sailing up the Nile, Ibn Battuta attempted to cross the Red Sea to the Arabian peninsula, but was stymied by conflict and returned to Cairo before departing in July 1326 to travel to Mecca via an alternative route. In Jerusalem, then a small town of around 10,000 inhabitants noted for its sacred Muslim sites such as al-Aqsa Mosque, he was smitten by the Dome of the Rock. “Both outside and inside, the decoration is so magnificent and the workmanship so surpassing as to defy description. The greater part is covered with gold so that the eyes of one who gazes on its beauties are dazzled by its brilliance, now glowing like a mass of light, now flashing like lightning.”

By contrast, Damascus – a short journey of 150 miles or so from Jerusalem – was a full-blown metropolis with a population around 10 times as great. In 634, Damascus had been the first major Byzantine city to fall to Muslim warriors – a feather in the cap for the fast-spreading Islamic empire. With a history stretching back centuries – it’s often claimed to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world – Damascus had long attracted florid praise from Muslim visitors. Ibn Battuta considered its Umayyad Mosque “the greatest mosque on earth”, and Damascus “the city that surpasses all other cities in beauty and takes precedence of them in loveliness”. Apart from rubbing shoulders with the cream of the city’s scholars, holy men and officials, we know he married again in Damascus, and just as quickly divorced; we also know that he took many concubines and fathered numerous children across several continents.

In September 1326, Ibn Battuta’s caravan set off south from Damascus towards Arabia, passing the mighty castle of Karak, “one of the most

marvellous, inaccessible and celebrated of fortresses”, still standing today. Once on the Arabian peninsula, he recounted that the caravan “pushes on speedily day and night, for fear of this wilderness”.

After four days in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, Ibn Battuta and his fellow pilgrims finally reached Mecca “with hearts full of gladness at reaching the goal of their hopes” – a spiritually uplifting experience. But once his pilgrimage was over, in mid-November, it was clear the young Moroccan had been bitten by the travel bug. There was no question of returning home.

Instead, Ibn Battuta set his sights on travelling north. In November he was invited by a rich official to share a relatively luxurious camel litter in a caravan bound for Mesopotamia (a land corresponding roughly with what’s now Iraq). Having passed through Basra, they looped through the mountains and orchards of Persia via Isfahan – “one of the largest and fairest of cities” – and Shiraz, where he admired the local women’s piety. He reached Baghdad in 1327, and recalled the famous verse his father used to recite to him: *“Baghdad for men of wealth has an ever-open door / But short and narrow shrift is all she gives the poor.”*

A spa-lover before his time, Ibn Battuta was again fascinated by the city’s public baths, impressed by their state-of-the-art facilities and by the Baghdadis’ generosity with fluffy towels. “Every bather is given three towels: one to wear round his waist when he goes in, another to wear round his waist when he comes out, and the third to dry himself with.”

More scholarly appetites were sated with visits to “the wonderful Nizamiya College” and, a stone’s throw from the river Tigris, Mustansiriya University, Baghdad’s finest ancient monument and one of the world’s oldest universities, founded in 1233.

Ibn Battuta was a proud, observant Muslim travelling – and later writing – in an era when the self-confident blaze of Islam illuminated much of Africa and Asia. For any Muslim, Baghdad – capital of the mighty Abbasid caliphate from 762 to 1258 – was a hallowed city, an architectural gem steeped in glorious history. In his words: “She is the abode of peace and capital of al-Islam, of illustrious rank and supreme pre-eminence, abode of caliphs and residence of scholars.”

Beyond Baghdad

After Baghdad, the adventures had to continue. There was a pause – understandable after totting up around 4,000 miles in frequently challenging conditions – while Ibn Battuta returned to his books. He backtracked to Mecca, where he studied and prayed for a year – then it was time to hit the road again.

In c1329–30, he sailed down the Red Sea, visiting Yemen before continuing south along the east African coast, calling in at Mogadishu and Mombasa, successfully dodging pirates and an unscrupulous guide’s plot to kill him. His party then sailed north again, rounding Oman and traversing the Gulf of Hormuz before crossing the Arabian peninsula from Bahrain to Mecca.

From 1330, he retraced his footsteps north and continued to Anatolia, aspects of which thrilled and disgusted him. In one city he learned that “they buy beautiful Greek slave girls and put them out to prostitution, and each girl has to pay a regular due to her master. I heard it said that the girls go into the bathhouses with the men, and anyone who wishes to indulge in depravity does so in the bathhouse – and nobody tries to stop him.”



The Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, a key site in the Qutb Minar complex that was still under construction when Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi in 1334

The ninth-century al-Qarawiyyin mosque in Fez, the great imperial city of Morocco, where Ibn Battuta dictated his travel memoirs to a young scribe in 1354



The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. "The decoration is so magnificent and the workmanship so surpassing as to defy description," Ibn Battuta enthused about this important Islamic shrine



AWL IMAGES/ LEE FROST-ROBERT HARDING/ALAMY

The journey east had barely begun when 4,000 Hindu rebels attacked Ibn Battuta's party. He was overrun and robbed

Sailing across the Black Sea to the Crimea, Ibn Battuta ventured up the Volga, then travelled south through the Balkans. Reaching Constantinople in 1332, the Moroccan did what he did best and indulged in some more shameless social climbing. As an erudite young scholar and man of letters, he managed to secure an audience with the Byzantine emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos, who gave him a robe of honour and assigned him a horse on which, to the accompaniment of “trumpets, fifes and drums”, he was paraded around the city to admire its “marvellous and rare sights”. He was made to sing for his supper and finery, quizzed by the curious emperor on Islamic cities including Jerusalem, Damascus, Cairo and Baghdad.

Though impressed by its great size, Ibn Battuta considered the Byzantine capital more like a dozen individual villages separated by fields than a single city. He caught the unmistakable whiff of imperial decline – broken bridges, filthy markets – in his description of the city, counterbalanced by a recognition of its powerful Christian identity, heritage and practice, not least in the Hagia Sophia, the great basilica church that he was told contained “thousands” of monks and priests.

That autumn, Ibn Battuta set out east again for central Asia, travelling via Bukhara to reach Samarkand, which he thought “one of the largest and most perfectly beautiful cities in the world”. Of its large palaces and impressive monuments, though, he saw that “the greater part are ruined and a portion of the city is also devastated – it has no wall or gates and there are no gardens outside the city itself”. Such scars were the legacy of ruinous Mongol invasions unleashed by Genghis Khan a century

before. Ibn Battuta's visit in 1333 came just a few decades before the arrival of Timur (often known as Tamerlane), who chose this ancient Silk Road city as his capital, and developed it into a great cultural and commercial centre.

The Moroccan was particularly excited to visit the tomb of Kusam ibn Abbas, cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, reputed to have arrived here in 676. Brimming with missionary fervour, Kusam was on a mission to convert Zoroastrian fire-worshippers to Islam. The local population did not take kindly to this foreign preacher, however, and he was apprehended and beheaded. Legend has it that he picked up his head and jumped down a well, where he has remained ever since, ready to resume his work. Arabs venerated him, and the tomb attracted many of the faithful over the centuries – and still does today.

From central Asia, Ibn Battuta pushed south-east, in 1334 arriving in India where he finagled his way into the service of Muhammad bin Tughluq, sultan of Delhi. Tradition dictated that visitors should bestow valuable gifts on the sultan, so Ibn Battuta borrowed goods from an Iraqi merchant, and presented 30

horses, camels, arrows and slaves. The return on his investment was immediate: the position of chief *qadi*, a huge signing-on bonus of 12,000 dinars and a fabulous annual salary of 12,000 dinars. He was rich.

Working for the notoriously cruel ruler was no picnic, though. The sultan was “far too free in shedding blood”, Ibn Battuta reckoned, a firm believer in hideously imaginative torture. Criminals were skinned alive or thrown into pens to be gored by elephants with tusk-mounted swords. Hundreds were brought in chains daily to the audience hall, the Moroccan reported, to be executed, tortured or beaten. At one point, Ibn Battuta himself was suspected of disloyalty and was forced to abandon his possessions, don a beggar's rags and live with a hermit in a cave for five months until things calmed down. One can easily imagine his relief when, in 1341, the sultan appointed him ambassador to the Mongol court in China, offering an escape route from a paranoid, disintegrating state.

Mission to China

The journey had barely begun when Ibn Battuta's party was attacked by 4,000 Hindu rebels. Then, chased by horsemen, he was overrun and robbed, narrowly escaping death. More scrapes followed, including a shipwreck resulting in the loss of his companions and the death of a slave girl pregnant with his child. Down but not out, Ibn Battuta decided to continue east alone. Sailing on, he stopped in the Maldives for nine months, where he became chief judge (again), joined the royal family and took another clutch of wives.

After another diversion to Sri Lanka, where he hobnobbed with the king and climbed the holy summit of Adam's Peak, in 1346 he docked at the port of Chittagong, in what's now



Byzantine emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos (1328–41), who quizzed Ibn Battuta about the great cities of Islam

Lights glimmer from the temple on top of Adam's Peak, Sri Lanka. Ibn Battuta climbed the peak to see a 'footprint' believed by Muslims to have been left by the first man

ALAMY

Bangladesh. Ibn Battuta thought it squalid, “a hell crammed with good things”, the latter presumably including the “extremely beautiful” slave girl he purchased. Sailing south again through the Strait of Malacca, he reached the Chinese port of Quanzhou later that year, though only after pirates and shipwrecks had once again robbed him of all his possessions. The orthodox Muslim did not take to China. Though impressed by the size of cities such as Hangzhou, at that time probably the most populous city on Earth, he confessed to being “greatly troubled” by the country’s “paganism”. The truth is that he was invariably happier travelling among his fellow Muslims, and by 1348 he was en route home via Sumatra.

During the 6,000-mile journey back to Morocco, in Damascus he learnt of the death of his father some 15 years

earlier and of a 10-year-old son he had never met. Yet no sooner had he returned to Morocco than he resolved to cross the Sahara to visit the empire of Mali, and set out in late 1351. Once there, he was disappointed by the food, including millet porridge and a yam-like root that made him seriously ill. But he was as determined as ever to receive the lavish presents from the ruler that he felt were his due.

“I have journeyed to the countries of the world and met their kings,” he told Mansa (emperor) Sulayman of Mali quite brazenly. “I have been four months in your country without your giving me a reception gift or anything else. What shall I say of you in the presence of other sultans?” The unabashed request had the desired effect: a house, an allowance and a quantity of gold. Not that this in any way curbed his acerbic comments on

what he called the “feeble intellect” of his fellow Africans.

Returning to Morocco from Mali, in 1354 Ibn Battuta settled in Fez, the great imperial city of Morocco. It was there, under the orders of the great Marinid Sultan Abu Inan – who was understandably impressed by the scholarly traveller – that he dictated the story of his life to a young writer, Ibn Juzayy. The result was his voluminous memoir, *The Precious Gift for Lookers into the Marvels of Cities and Wonders of Travel*, known in Arabic as the *Rihla* (‘Journey’). The ultimate Arab travelogue is as fresh today as it was when first dictated in the mid-14th century, at once erudite, anecdotal, humorous, humane and consistently entertaining. 🌐

In the great imperial city of Fez, Ibn Battuta dictated the story of his life to a young writer. The result was his voluminous memoir



Justin Marozzi is a historian and travel writer, and the author of *Islamic Empires: Fifteen Cities that Define a Civilization* (Allen Lane, 2019)



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How the events of 1989 transformed lives on both sides of the border – and changed Europe forever



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Jung Chang

The Wild Swans
author discusses her new book on three women who shaped 20th-century China



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“Manuscripts such as this transported their readers to distant lands”

Barlaam and Josaphat manuscript

Created by: A follower of Hans Schilling, 1469

Now at: The Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Chosen by: **Bryan C Keene**

This illustrated manuscript is one of more than 50 German and Latin texts produced in the 15th century by a thriving workshop in the Hagenau commune, now in eastern France. It depicts the tale of Barlaam and Josaphat as told by Rudolf von Ems (1200–54). We are told that prince Josaphat lived in isolation for many years in a royal palace in India; then, one day, he witnessed illness, old age and death for the first time. Distraught, he meditated under a tree until he met Barlaam, a Christian monk and, renouncing worldly pleasures, converted to Christianity.

The manuscript of nearly 760 pages features 138 narrative scenes. There's Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, which establishes a starting point in the manuscript and reveals the world view of the author. Then, later, Christians are burned at the stake by Josaphat's father, King Avenir, and personifications of planets and heavenly luminaries. We also meet biblical figures including Noah and Moses giving sermons on virtue and vice.

Led by Diebold Lauber and his close associate Hans Schilling, the workshop specialised in making illustrated books on paper. The manuscripts they decorated transported readers to distant lands and introduced them to dramatic events of human history and legend. In this image, the prince and his retinue are depicted wearing 15th-century high fashion, with

doublets and pointed shoes, coloured with a palette of ink and washes including rhubarb and vermilion (reds), vivid verdigris (green), and the occasional azurite (blue).

Barlaam and Josaphat is so significant because it is a Christianised version of the life of the Buddha.

It took scholars centuries to realise that the Latin name Josaphat derives from *Ioasaph* in Greek, from *Iodasaph* in Georgian, *Budhasaf* in Arabic, and ultimately *bodhisattva* in Sanskrit – an enlightened follower of the Buddha who helps others reach Nirvana, or release from the cycle of desire and suffering.

Versions appeared at least eight centuries before the Portuguese humanist Diogo do Couto (c1542–1616) recognised shared events in the life of the fictional Josaphat and that of the historical Buddha. Variations of the story appeared in the eighth-century writings of John of Damascus, who features as a key figure in the Schilling version, and in texts by writers including Yahya ibn Khalid (ninth century, Bactria) and Marco Polo (14th century, Italy). Accounts have appeared in a multitude of languages, from French and Ge'ez to Tagalog and Yiddish.

It is, perhaps, ironic that a tale about renouncing worldliness has traversed the globe and spanned vast geographies through local interpretation and artistic expression. Indeed, the rare rhubarb red in this manuscript likely came from India or even China, which inspires questions about trade and travel. The study of the



pathways by which such knowledge travelled forms part of a field of inquiry known as the global Middle Ages. Much like today's museums and libraries, illuminated manuscripts and illustrated books preserve a rich array of information about how people perceived the world, its many cultures, and their place in it. This field of study also considers vantage points from beyond Europe, whose histories have long been central to a view of the medieval era. For example, scholars have suggested links between a supernova that occurred in 1054, North Amerindian petroglyphs, and texts from Japan, China, Iraq and Europe. Further study will, hopefully, reveal more links between all corners of the medieval world. 🌐

Bryan C Keene is a curator of manuscripts at the Getty Museum in LA. His latest book is the edited volume *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts* (Getty Publications, 2019)

